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DECEMBER
1990

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Pat Murphy
Lisa Tuttle
& others

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interviewed

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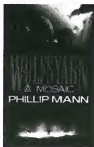
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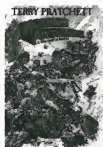
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Submissions: stories, in the 2,000-6,000 word range, should be sent singly and each one must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons. We are unable to reply to writers who do not send return postage. No responsibility can be accepted for loss or damage to unsolicited material, howsoever caused. Submissions should be sent to either of the following addresses: Lee Montgomerie, 53 Riviera Gardens, Leeds LS7 3DW
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interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 42

December 1990

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Interface

Lee Montgomerie

It is with more embarrassment than pride that we introduce our first all-female issue, indeed our first ever issue with even a preponderance of women writers. We have published many an all-male edition of *Interzone* without making a Special Issue of it, or even the slightest assumption that, say, *Interzones* 35, 36 and 37, a deplorable trilogy of unabashed masculine maghogg, presumed to sum up or even illuminate the Male Experience. So why even comment on this largely contingent lineup of stories, articles, reviews and interviews from the other side of the gender barrier?

Up to now, we have consistently published about five times as many stories by men as by women, a statistic even more damning than our four-to-one ratio of male to female readers, but one which (alas) quite accurately reflects the proportion of manuscripts submitted by the respective sexes and (alas again) the balance of male to female writers in our Books Received columns and on the sf shelves of Smith's and Menzies.

Worse, women have fared disproportionately badly in our annual popularity polls and only four (Le Guin, Cherryh, Tiptree and Russ) made the top 50 in our readers' All-Time Greats. Women in science fiction appear to be a beleaguered minority. Is it any wonder that many of the story titles in this issue read like chapter headings from a survival guide for the undercover agent in a hostile alien culture?

RETREAT FROM A GOLDEN MOMENT

For most of its history, apart from the golden moment in the seventies when the likes of Le Guin, Cherryh, Tiptree and Russ sprang into prominence, sf has been a somewhat uncongenial medium for female writers, its imaginative freedoms and subversive possibilities guarded by barricades of vocabulary and ideology designed to keep the girls out in the first place. Much of the emergent feminist outrage that informed and invigorated the women's sf book seems to have been diverted into a cosy sub-generic wallow, in which readers and writers together luxuriate in fulminating against masculine perfidy or fantasizing about the elysian lesbian millenium while current fashion in general sf has retreated to the masculine bastions of glossy technologies and technical glossaries.

It is not that the barriers are insuperable. The science fiction field still includes a substantial share of female market leaders, luminaries and promising newcomers; it is just that they continue to be outnumbered by men in a proportion that would be scandalous among Booker Prize contenders. This edition of *Interzone* attempts to go a small way towards redressing the balance. However it does not pretend to present more than a minuscule selection of the science fiction that women can (and, we hope, will) write.

Oh, and since sf is a literature which constantly challenges assumptions, I would like to lay to rest the belief that all IZ editors can be addressed as Sir, Mr or Esq. Lee is a unisex name, chaps. Send your ms to a Ms.

(Lee Montgomerie)

1990 HUGO AWARDS

The Hugo Award winners, announced at the World Science Fiction Convention ("Confection") in the Hague, Netherlands, at the end of August, were as follows:

Best novel: *Hyperion* by **Dan Simmons**
 Best novella: "The Mountains of Mourning" by **Lois McMaster Bujold**
 Best novelette: "Enter a Soldier..." by **Robert Silverberg**
 Best short story: "Boobs" by **Suzy McKee Charnas**
 Best dramatic presentation: *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* dir. **Steven Spielberg**
 Best non-fiction book: *The World Beyond the Hill* by **Alexei & Cory Pan-shin**
 Best professional editor: **Gardner Dozois** (Asimov's)
 Best professional artist: **Don Maitz**
 Best semi-prozine: *Locus* ed. **Charles N. Brown**
 Best fan writer: **David Langford**
 John W. Campbell Award for best new writer: **Kristine Kathryn Rusch**

We offer our congratulations to everybody concerned, and especially to *Interzone* contributor David Langford, the only non-American to win a Hugo this year (unless one counts Sean Connery, who, as someone remarked, was probably the "real winner" of the dramatic presentation award).

THE COMING OF MILLION

Last issue, all *Interzone* subscribers should have received a four-page colour brochure advertising a new publication called *Million: The Magazine of*

Popular Fiction. Although it's not specifically a science-fiction magazine, this is *Interzone*'s new stable-mate, edited and published by **David Pringle** from the familiar Brighton address. The first issue should be out in early December 1990, and the front cover is reproduced on page 75 of this IZ.

Million is devoted to popular and genre fiction in all its forms (including what critic Leslie Fiedler calls the "post-print media"). Its purpose is to provide a forum for discussion of, and information about, popular fiction and its audiences and creators. To the best of our knowledge, no such magazine exists in Britain – certain American periodicals, such as *Armchair Detective*, come closest to what we have in mind.

The Associate Editor is **Kim Newman**, and the team of advisory editors and contributing writers includes **Mary Cadogan** (author of biographies of Frank Richards and Richmal Crompton) and **Kathy Gale** (editorial director of Pan Books responsible for crime fiction and sf/fantasy) – alongside such well-known IZ contributors as **Paul McAuley**, **Stan Nicholls**, **Lisa Tuttle** and **Brian Stableford**. The magazine will carry one or two short stories per issue, but it's not primarily intended as a vehicle for original fiction. Most of the contents will consist of profile/interviews of such famous writers as **Dick Francis**, **Colin Dexter** and **James Ellroy** (all featured in the first issue) and articles about authors of the past (Dennis Wheatley, **Marie Corelli**, **P. C. Wren**, **Baroness Orczy**, etc). There will also be book reviews, film reviews, bibliographies, short filler articles and so on.

Million will include some coverage of sf, fantasy and horror, but there will be considerable emphasis on romance and historical fiction as well as crime, mystery and adventure in all its forms. There will also be a good deal of information about series characters, sequels-by-other-hands, and all the pulp delights of yesteryear. For anyone interested in popular fiction as a subject, whether as a fan, collector, aspiring novelist, or student or teacher of popular culture, the magazine should prove essential reading.

Advance subscriptions are welcomed. Please send £12 for six issues inland (£15, overseas; \$24, USA). Make cheques or postal orders payable to "Popular Fictions," and address them to 124 Osborne Road, Brighton,

BN1 6LU, UK. We would also be interested in hearing from any IZ readers who have suggestions for articles, interviews and other contributions to *Million* (but no story submissions at present, please!).

(DP)

Interaction

Dear Editors:

If you are wondering where an Egyptian gets hold of *Interzone*, let me explain. My name is China Mieville. I have subscribed to IZ for a couple of years now. I am doing a year's voluntary work in Egypt before going to university, and I have each new issue sent on to me here.

Still looking for lists of top ten books? OK, in no particular order: 1) *Life During Wartime* by Lucius Shepard – bloody marvellous book, better for me than *Green Eyes*; 2) *The Ice Monkey* or *Viriconium* by M. John Harrison; 3) *The Anubis Gotes* by Tim Powers – I had to include that because it's so hugely exciting and clever; 4) *The Book of the New Sun* by Gene Wolfe – I've only read the first two volumes but they're enough to tell me the series counts in my top ten; 5) *Comp Concentration* by Thomas M. Disch – real toss-up here with *The Businessman* and his brilliant collections; 6) *Golgothic Pot-Healer* or *Mortion Time-Slip* by Philip K. Dick – the two best of his I've read; 7) *More Thon Humon* by Theodore Sturgeon – old-fashioned, I know, but I've re-read it so many times without diminished pleasure; 8) *Stond on Zonzibor* by John Brunner; 9) *Riddley Walker* by Russell Hoban; 10) *Golem 100* by Alfred Bester.

I would have added *Lord of the Flies* but it's not sf – just brilliant. Honourable mentions: maybe some readers would like to know about *Swostiko Night* by Katherine Burdakin. It was originally published under a pseudonym I forget ["Murray Constantine" – Ed.]. One of the very few works of fiction ever published by the Left Book Club [in the 1930s], it pre-empted *The Mon in the High Castle* by many years by being about an alternative future wherein the Nazis won World War II...

Interzone 39 was not a sparkling issue. What was "Now Read On..." by David Garnett doing in your magazine? A lightweight piece of authorial whimsy has no place in the pages of IZ, supposedly a showcase of intelli-

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If you can afford to do so, why not consider supporting this magazine by taking out a very long-term subscription? (We define a "lifetime sub" as one which lasts either the lifetime of the subscriber or the lifetime of the magazine.)

We have already been going for over eight years, and we have moved from quarterly to bimonthly to monthly publication, so early "lifetime" bought a bargain! Lifetime subscriptions to *Interzone* now cost £230 (UK); \$420 or equivalent (overseas); \$520 or equivalent (overseas air mail). Please make your cheque payable to "Interzone" and send it to our main editorial address, shown on page 3.

BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *Interzone* are still readily available (except for issues 1, 5, 7 and 17). They cost £2.30 each inland (postage included), or £2.50 each overseas (USA: \$4 sea mail, or \$5 air mail). However, UK purchasers who buy three or more in one order may have them at £1.95 each (i.e. post free).

gent sf. Brian Stableford has written much better stuff as well – "The Invertebrate Story" I could glibly call his piece. "Beefcake" was better but had a disappointing ending: with all the possibilities open to him for an ending, I think Keith Brooke chose the flattest and most dead-end option – a shame, because otherwise it was great. "Dilation Sleep" by Alastair Reynolds was probably quite good. I don't know. I can't judge technophile quasi-cyberpunk because I find it dull. But that's personal.

"Past Magic" by Ian R. MacLeod lifted the standard somewhat. That I would say is what I expect of IZ. But the only real gem was "Lizard Lust" by Lisa Tuttle. That was a good story – enigmatic, disturbing, relevant and well-written, miles above the Stableford and

Garnett. IZ stories should not unbalance each other like that, and normally they don't. There are always one or two stories, however, which my mother or some friend reads and in which they point out one or two glaring and amateur stylistic flaws. This is embarrassing to me, as I spend my time desperately asserting the "validity" of sf and citing IZ as an example of "what sf can and should be." Sometimes you undercut my efforts.

The cover of IZ 39 is an all-time low. My partner in Egypt is not an sf fan. I had just about convinced him that sf could be good when he saw that cover as I opened my package. "That's shit," he said, just like that. All my efforts wasted. Please stop shooting yourselves in the foot by printing covers that belong on *The 11th Armado Book of Spore Stories*. I don't understand why you use such dross for the covers when you are obviously discerning – "Mutant Popcorn," my beloved John Clute and at least half the stories are testimony to that. IZ is bloody good, and bloody adventurous at times! I just wish you'd let on to the fact through your covers.

Sterling's "Workshop Lexicon" article was excellent.

Finally, not a cry I've heard from many quarters, so not something I expect to change, but maybe you could air for opinions: personally, readers' letters are one of my favourite parts of any magazine. It can be really fun and interesting if you get long-ish discussions, etc, on the letters page. At the very least, I'd like to see the page expanded extensively. Why not four or five pages? Wouldn't that be fun?

Despite my extensive criticism, you are absolutely assured of my subscription for the foreseeable future. IZ gives me a lot of pleasure, and I want to thank you for that.

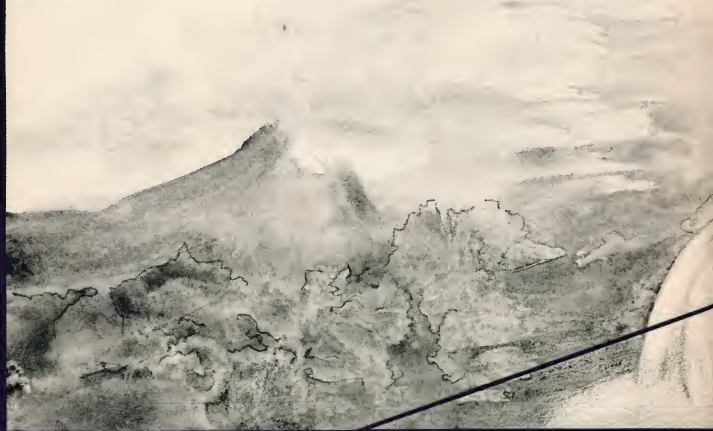
China Mieville
Monsour, Egypt

Editor: Dovid Gornett's "Now Read On..." was indeed meant to be "a lightweight piece of whimsy." We like to run such stories occasionally for a change of pace: not every bit of fiction we publish can be uniformly deep, dork and significant. Some readers berate us for being too solemn and portentous, but whenever we run a humorous story such as the Gornett we get others writing in and complaining about the waste of space. So old editors have to learn sooner or later that you can't please all of the readers all of the time... The some goes for our cover art. Tim White's pointing on IZ 39 was popular with some, but I can understand it not being to everyone's taste. Our covers vary enormously in style, and that's a deliberate policy: we want to entice different sorts of readers in.

Continued on page 74

To Be of Use

Lisa Tuttle



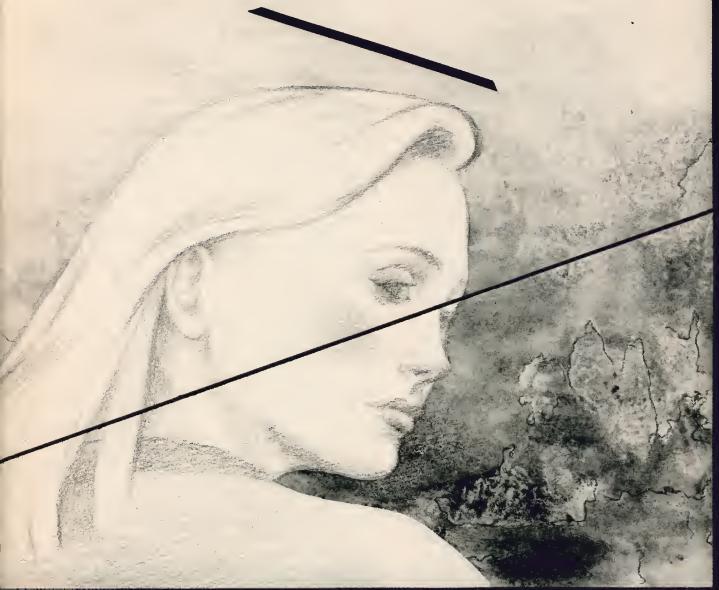
Thea had been living her dream for so long she'd nearly forgotten it had ever been one. This was her life. Mornings, she woke to Julian's warmth beside her in the old soft bed; woke pleased and gratified by her husband's presence.

She was always first up, to warm the house and the water for his bath and to make the tea. She did all the cooking, and most of the housework, as well as acting as Julian's agent and business manager, and then there were the bits and pieces of work she did for money, indexing mostly, and a little editing. Hers was a busy, satisfying life. Sometimes she regretted the lack of children, but she had never argued against Julian's opposition. She was warmed by the thought that he didn't want to share her with anyone. They were a couple, complete; they lived for each other.

Her friends and relatives had never understood this. Most of them thought that Julian was somehow beneath her, and while they were willing to accept her romantic attachment to this scruffy, bad-tempered character as providing some emotional balance to her life in London, they had been horrified when she gave

up everything – a “glamorous” job, a desirable flat in WC1, a whole, glittering, social network – to bury herself in a small, damp cottage in Wales where she was, simply, “Julian's wife.” It wasn't even as if Julian could support a wife. Their cottage had been bought outright with the proceeds from the sale of Thea's flat, and considerably more than half their joint annual income came from her own uncelebrated work.

They didn't understand that, to Thea, Julian was more than just her husband. She loved him, but it was his genius that she served. For that she had willingly sacrificed her own career, a more suitable marriage, the possibility of children... Julian was a poet. And the poet's wife was, if not always the muse, then at least the midwife to poetry. Unable to be, herself, a poet, she could imagine no more noble role than the one she had chosen. It was, after all, the idea of serving as a handmaiden to literature that first had led her to a job in publishing.



Julian's poetry had ravished her before she ever met the man.

He came into her life as an unsolicited manuscript, a sheaf of poems archaically typed and submitted by the author, one Julian Doone. They came in all the time, these piles of paper, with their stiff, naive covering letters addressed to unnamed editors. They were like messages cast out to sea in bottles, or posted on the side of a tree in some dense, uncivilized jungle, and with about as much likelihood of being discovered by the world at large. From this one, Thea drew out a page at random, intending to decide whether to send it back with a form letter or a more encouraging personal rejection.

She read one poem. And felt something stir deep within her, something that fluttered and then began, steadily, to beat, like a second heart.

She read another poem, and then another, and then she couldn't read anymore. She was gasping for breath, swimming in a rich, strange sea, and when she looked up, dazzled, the world was different.

It was like the first time she had read Hopkins,

Yeats, Dickinson, Stevens — Thea trusted her visceral knowledge. This was true poetry. She had to publish it.

Although Julian Doone was hardly the first unknown author Thea had taken a chance on, she felt instinctively that he would be far and away the most important.

There was no telephone number given, but that evening Thea went to the address on the covering letter, which turned out to be that of a decaying house in a dangerous-looking street near the Oval. It was a squat, she later discovered, and he lived there with some indeterminate number of others.

Julian Doone was short and thin and shabbily dressed, with spikey, fairish hair. His eyes were long-lashed, green, and quite beautiful, his other features unremarkable. He was twenty-four, with a Birmingham accent and a degree from Bristol, had been in London for two years, and made his living from casual labour, mostly in construction.

Their first meeting was awkward. Thea, usually so fluent and sure of herself, was in awe of this young

man's talent, and she communicated her unease to him. But over dinner in a local Italian restaurant Julian realized that he had sold his book, and his happiness, and the wine, made him more relaxed and talkative. Thea began to like him.

They went back to his house for coffee. Someone was in the sitting room, watching television. Julian hesitated in the hall. "We could sit in the kitchen, but it's not as comfortable as my room."

"Then let's go to your room. You make the coffee and bring it – where?"

"Upstairs – right at the top."

At the very top of the stairs was a room, but it was not empty. There was a girl sprawled on the bed, reading a comic: thin, young, fairish, shabbily dressed, she might have been Julian's sister, but Thea didn't think so.

"Isn't this Julian's room?"

"Yeah." The girl sat up. Belatedly, a look of mild alarm, or maybe it was guilt, flickered across her face. "Um, I was just waiting for him. Just came by to visit; he wasn't here, thought I'd wait. I'm Bee, by the way. Um, who are you?"

"I'm his wife," said Thea.

"Oh, shit," said the girl.

Neither said anything else. The girl left. Thea had been shocked into silence by her own words. Even more disturbing than the fact of the lie was her realization that it was a wish. She was usually attracted to older men, successful, well-dressed, with good manners and impeccable accents. But that was mere attraction. She had never been in love before. This, she knew, was the real thing.

It took him rather longer to catch on. Two years passed before they married. Julian's book was published by Thea's company, and he was a success, in a low-budget way. Success did not suit him; not, anyway, the sort on offer in the small world of literary London. He drank too much and insulted people. He accepted commissions – book reviews, lectures, columns – he was incapable of fulfilling. He squandered his energy on quarrels, parties and sex, leaving none for poetry. One night, in some dim, noisy, crowded, public room, Thea looked at him, and saw a drowning man. He looked at his reflection in her eyes, and closed his. "Save me," he said.

And so she had.

The day was too fine to stay indoors. It was late October, so there wouldn't be many more clear, golden days before winter fell on them like a cold, wet blanket. Julian was gardening, which she found boring, so Thea left him to it and set out walking up the mountain.

She didn't make it to the top. She didn't intend to. In company, she would make the effort, but she felt no need to push herself when alone. She'd been to the top and considered that the view from halfway up was nearly as nice. She stopped by the stream for a drink of cold, delicious water, then settled on a rock, legs stretched out and skirt pulled up so she could feel the sun's heat on her skin. She looked at her pale white legs, then out at the green-blue-brown-golden valley below, and then she shut her eyes. Ah, lovely. If she could write poetry, she'd write about this. Julian had written poems about "their" mountain – one from

this very spot – but none of them were what she would write, if she could. Not what it looked like, or what it reminded her of, but how it felt. Not how she felt, but the mountain. How it felt her.

Did that make sense? It didn't matter. Drowsing alone in the open air she was free, she could think anything, she didn't have to justify it, or act on it, or feel guilty about it, she didn't have to explain or understand, she could just be, like the mountain.

She felt the sunshine, soft and golden, and the air, crisp as apples, and the silence, warm as love... and something else. Some other quality the day possessed, something which could be felt but not described, not touched not seen or heard or tasted or smelt – Something else. Something new. She wanted to name it. Almost...

What was it, what was it? Nothing peaceful, nothing ordinary, not here, not now, not this. She kept her eyes tight shut and clenched her hands, struggling. Her heart pounded hard, and there was something buzzing inside her, something that might have been fear or... or... Anticipation. Desire. Terror. Like bees, waking from a long sleep, buzzing in the hollow of her chest. Breaking through the paper shell which had held them, their wings stirring, a million tiny hearts in her bloodstream. Let us out, let us out.

She opened her mouth wide, as wide as she could. And they came pouring out. Words, not bees. But not her words. They came from somewhere, someone, else. They were not English, not French, not German, not any other language she had ever heard. They were not her words. She did not understand them. And it was not her voice. Not her choice. Maybe not language. Maybe a new kind of music, and she was its instrument. The music played her, it poured through her, through her chest and throat and lungs, out into the empty, waiting countryside.

And then, suddenly as it had begun, it was over. Silence rushed in again. Feeling like an empty skin, Thea collapsed, letting herself fall to one side, just careful enough not to bang her head. She listened to the blood pounding in her ears, and then, after a while, she could hear the silver rush of the stream, and the call of a bird. Not silence, after all. Never silence – except for that one, waiting moment, just before it began. She became aware of the warmth of the rock against her cheek, and opened her eyes. Scarcely an inch away from her face an ant ran hectically this way and that. A perfectly ordinary ant, ordinary rock, normal autumn sun shining above, just as a few minutes before. She was still Dorothea Harley Doone, halfway up a mountain in Wales, only a mile or so from her home and husband. Wasn't she? Thea stood up, resisting the temptation to take off her clothes and look for some physical change. She knew there would be nothing to see. Nothing had changed. And yet everything had. The details remained exactly the same. But the meaning – the meaning now was utterly different.

She didn't tell Julian what had happened to her because she didn't know what had happened to her. To describe it would make it into something, and the words she used would determine what that was. A panic attack? A psychotic episode? Possession? Religious ecstasy? To talk about it would be to turn it into something, something it had not been,

and limit it. Not wanting that, Thea said nothing. She cooked dinner as usual, and during the meal they talked about the weather, and about a book Julian had been reading.

After dinner, they discovered the television did not work. Nor did the wireless. Thea felt something flutter in her chest: fear? Or hope?

"Funny," said Julian. "Both of them going at once."

The next day, they discovered the phone line was dead and the car radio wasn't picking up any signals, either. This couldn't be coincidence, they agreed. It had to mean something. Their thoughts moved in the same grim direction as they drove, in silence, to the nearest town. Thea remembered, vaguely, that one of the effects of a nuclear strike was meant to be disruption of broadcast signals, but she had no idea how far that effect might stretch. If it was London...but if Washington or Beirut had been bombed, how badly would they be affected here in Wales? Was this really the end?

The car park on the edge of town was filled to overflowing. Thea had never seen it like that except at August bank holiday. Julian simply pulled the car off the road, onto the narrow verge, and stopped. Others were doing the same, leaving their cars to join the crowds making a straggling progress towards the town centre.

Thea saw David Evans, the farmer they got their milk from, whose wife had been so kind the time that she got ill, and she called out a greeting.

He wheeled round to face her. His expression was one she couldn't name, and it made her uneasy. "How are you, David? And how's Mary and the girls?"

"The hand of God has touched her," he said hoarsely. "He reached out and put His hand on my wife, and she praised His name. She couldn't do anything but sing out His praise."

The hand of God. The phrase electrified her. Was that it? Had she, too, been touched by the hand of God and made to sing His praise?

At the age of fifteen Thea had decided there was no God. Since then, comfortable in her atheism, even though married to a man who professed to be a Christian, she had seldom given the matter any thought. Would she now have to believe? Had that been conversation she had experienced on the mountainside?

She was so caught up in her thoughts she scarcely noticed that David had pulled her away from David Evans and down the road and into The Bell.

It wasn't even lunchtime yet but the pub was packed to the beams. The smell and heat of so many bodies, and the clamour of their many voices, made her feel dizzy almost immediately. Julian managed to find a stool for her, but sitting down, lower than the crowds, made her feel worse, so she stood up, putting her cardigan and bag on the stool and using it to claim a little more space. She heard someone talking about a fearful wreck on the A40: two people dead, at least ten injured. "And, you know, it was two hours before the ambulance could reach them; they were lying there in their agony and crying out, like voices of the damned it was, and nobody could do a thing to get the poor souls to hospital. Two hours!"

"Lucky it wasn't more dead, then."

"Oh, it will be!"

Julian came back with their drinks.

"Can't we drink outside?" said Thea. "It's so hot in here."

He shrugged and followed her out. Other drinkers had already spilled into the car park before them. Thea heard a man say, "Of course it's not only us! You daft? Who'd want to attack us? What for? It's the whole country, mark my words."

"Or the whole world," said another man.

"Oh, you and your saucers!"

"It's not just the telly and the radio and the phone," said Julian in a low voice. "It was all the machines, everything electrical, that stopped yesterday. Nobody agrees exactly how long – maybe an hour, maybe less – but everybody says it happened. All the power went. Not just lights and machinery, but cars too. Driving along, the engines cut out. Cars, tractors, generators, milking machines, sewing machines, the lot. Everything stopped... while you were out for your walk, and I was working in the garden. Then it all came on again. Just like that." He took a long drink of his beer.

"Except not the telly or radio."

"Bloke behind the bar reckons it's the Americans, some kind of experiment which went wrong. He says they'll cover it up and we'll never know. Or else it's not the Americans but the English, and it didn't happen anywhere but here, part of a plot to confuse and control Taffy." He gave her the look they shared as outsiders, then grinned into his beer.

"I think it's the whole world," Thea said, although she hadn't known what she thought until she said it.

"It's UFOs," said a man nearby. It was impossible to tell if he was addressing them, someone else, or talking to himself. "Like all the reports, interference with electricals, lights in the sky, people hearing voices. Only the scale is different."

"Who's hearing voices?" asked Thea.

He gave her a sidelong look. She didn't recognize him and he didn't sound like a local. "Not me," he said. "Not me." He moved away.

"Mary Evans, for one," said Julian. "Or maybe it was David who heard the voices." He sounded relaxed. His beer was half gone. She realized he was enjoying himself, no longer nervous as he had been during the tense drive into town. She herself was nervous, but it was a pleasurable nervousness, connected to the intoxicating memory of what had happened to her on the mountainside. It must have happened to other people, too. Some great power had briefly touched the earth, its presence interfering with or annihilating all lesser powers, and she had been one of the few blessed to receive its impress on her own body.

"Do you think it was the Hand of God?" she asked.

He laughed. "Repent and reform, O children of Gomorrah, or next time I'll turn out the lights for good! And no telly for a week, just to show you I'm serious."

"I think there's been a nuclear accident." Thea looked around at the voice and saw the man who owned their favourite restaurant. "It'll get a lot worse before it gets better. It's not over, not by a long chalk."

"Cheer up, Mal," said Julian. "Maybe it's sunspots. Or something happening in the ozone layer."

"Or alien invaders from outer space," said a local bookseller, joining them. "That's what my husband reckons: little green men from outer space."

"You shouldn't have made him work in the science-fiction section, Jenny; he's taking all that stuff seriously now!"

They all laughed except Thea who said, "Why

shouldn't he take it seriously? Nobody knows what's happened, but one thing sure about it is it wasn't something ordinary, it wasn't something we could do. It's just as silly to blame the Americans as to try to pretend it was nothing more than a change in the weather. There's some power behind what happened, and it's not human. If it's not human, then what is it? What's left?"

"Aliens?" said Julian, still not seeing she was serious.
"God," said Thea.

It was aliens.
Broadcasting resumed all at once, mid-morning the following day. Julian had left the radio on in his study and as soon as the hiss of dead air came alive he charged into the sitting room to switch on the television. Thea abandoned the manuscript she had been line-editing.

According to the announcer, creatures from another world had appeared, and it was their arrival, apparently simultaneously in about a dozen different spots around the globe, which caused the power disruptions. They did not appear to be violent or aggressive, but it was impossible to know what their ultimate intentions might be, or even their immediate intentions. They did not appear to be trying to communicate, although a number of individuals claimed to be in psychic communion with the aliens, and were calling themselves Translators.

It was still impossible to know how many aliens there were, as they had chosen generally the most remote and inaccessible regions – the great deserts, the ice-bound far north, mountain-tops – with one exception. There were seven aliens in the USA, in Houston – not at the space centre, however, but in a plaza downtown – and now, technology permitting, the BBC would be presenting a report, live, from Houston, Texas.

Something happened to the screen. Thea blinked and blinked, but it wasn't the television; her vision was pricked with a million points of light and the big, flat screen vanished, along with the rest of the sitting-room. The blood roared in her ears, submerging all other sounds, and the next thing she knew, Julian's face was hanging over her, at once remote and near, strange and suffocatingly familiar. She understood that she was lying on the floor. Her body ached with a dull, concussed pain. She flinched when he touched her: for a moment she thought, wildly, that he had knocked her down.

"You fainted," he said.

But that seemed as absurd as the idea that he had knocked her down. Something else had happened.
"What did I say?"

He wet his lips before he spoke. "You...I wasn't looking at you, I was watching the television. Then, I heard – really, I felt you fall. You just crumpled and hit the floor before I could catch you. But I don't think you hit your head, and it was only for a few seconds that you were out. How do you feel?"

She mistrusted his pause. She knew he was leaving something out. "Help me up." Sitting up, feeling his arms around her, his familiar, human warmth anchoring her to normality, she said, "Did I say anything? Make a noise?"

"You didn't say anything. You just fell." His voice was a little too firm, unnaturally certain, as if he had to

convince himself. But he was anxious about her; there could be no doubting his concern. "How do you feel?"

"I know what happened," she said. "It's the aliens. They've chosen me. That's what it is." She spoke with absolute, utter certainty. Not God, aliens. Not religious conversion, but something else, another kind, a new calling. "I told you what happened to me on the mountain." She had tried, anyway, last night, although she had known her words were inadequate and she had seen him resisting the knowledge, denigrating her experience in his mind as if it had been something like an acid vision or a fever dream, something she would get over.

"I know you can't understand, but I'm asking you to trust me. They've called me. Believe me, I know. I'm one of the ones they can communicate with. I'll have to go."

"Go? What are you talking about? Go where? Who are they, these aliens? You've never even seen one – you don't even know they exist!"

She moved her head to look at the television but he blocked her view with his body, insisting, "There's nothing there! I saw what they showed – just a sort of flickering effect, not any kind of creature, just bad special effects. It could be anything or nothing. More probably nothing. People claim they've seen them, but that could be mass hysteria. Or a hoax, a plot by the CIA. Why America, why Houston, for God's sake? Doesn't that strike you as a little bit suspicious?"

"They're in a lot of different places. There's some in northern Europe, too. It doesn't matter that I haven't seen them. I've felt their presence. I know they're real. And I know I have to do something about it. Sometimes you just know things...like you knew, before anyone gave you any encouragement, that you were a poet, and I knew, too...like I knew I loved you, and I knew you needed me, when we'd only spent a couple of hours together – before that, really... it was completely crazy, me telling that girl I was your wife. Only, as soon as I said it, I knew it was true."

"That you wanted it to be true, you mean. You'd met me. People fall in love like that, at first sight, all the time. I was attracted, too, even if it took me a while to twig... You can't compare this to our relationship, you can't! This – I'm sorry, darling, but this isn't normal. It's not like love, it's some kind of craziness, and you have got to fight it."

"Julian, I'm not sick, and I'm not crazy. This is the most important thing that's ever happened to me. It's what I was meant for. I know it will be hard for you to understand, but – trust me, please. I know what I have to do. I have to go to them, wherever they are. It's no good me staying here, having this talent and keeping it hidden. I have to go to the aliens, where I can be of use. They need me."

"They need you!" He pulled away to glare at her. "They don't even know you exist! What about me? Don't I need you?"

She could remember a time when she had believed – when they both believed – that he did need her; that without her presence and her constant, practical support he would simply fall apart. That belief belonged to another time, as if to another person. "You'll be all right. You'll manage. I know you're used to me doing things for you, but you're not incapable. You'll want a good agent to look after the business side of things –

Jane would be glad to take you on – and if you're worried about the cooking and cleaning –"

"Dammit, woman, I'm not worried about losing my housekeeper! How can you think that's what I care about? It's not my agent, it's my wife I'm sitting here with. I love you, don't you know that?"

She had never been more painfully aware of his love. She had never imagined it could be such a burden.

"I'm sorry," she said quietly. "I love you too, I always will. This doesn't affect that. But I have to go away. There's something I have to do. It's something in me that has to come out... it's like poetry for you."

He made a sound like a tortured animal. "How can you say that! What a – what's poetry? It would never make me leave you. It's my work; it's not more important than my life with you – it's not even separable from my life with you!" They were both silent. Then, painfully, he went on, "Is that what you thought? Did I make you choose? Did you think you had to give up your job and your friends for me, so that I could write? I never asked for that – oh, God, I'm sorry if you thought I did! I could have written anywhere, you know... we could have stayed in London!"

That wasn't true, and he knew it as well as she. But she wasn't trying to score points.

"It was no sacrifice, believe me, Julian. I was happy to leave London. My job was just a job. It wasn't until I met you that I knew what I wanted. I wanted you, and whatever was best for you."

"And now you don't."

"Haven't stopped loving you. I never will stop loving you. It's just that... it's not enough any more. You can't be my whole life. I need something else – no, that's not right, that sounds selfish. What I mean is that for a long time being your wife was the most and the best I could be. But now there's another need – it's not my need, it's a need for me, a need for a talent I never knew I had. It's a brand-new talent, a brand-new role that has to be filled. Because I can do it, I have to do it. It's a calling, Julian. It would be wrong to ignore it, even if I could. It's as though you have to write and I have to... do this... whatever it is. I have to, that's all."

The silence stretched on for so long Thea began to feel that neither of them would ever speak again. They were close, physically – she leaning back in his arms, his chest solid against her back, his breath warm on the side of her face – but in her mind she had already left him. She was startled when he spoke, as if the words had come from somewhere else.

"All right."

Her heart thudded. She struggled to sit up, to move away from him, but he held her still.

"It's not fair of me to ask you to choose," he said. "But it's not fair of you, either, to force me. I don't understand what this is that you want to do, but... if you have to do it, if it's important, then of course you must. Do it, but don't leave me. That's all I ask."

"Julian, I can't stay here – I have to go to them."

"Then I'll go with you. Wherever it is. I'll follow you."

The aliens had chosen some of the areas most remote from human habitation on the planet. Reaching them would not be easy. Even finding out where they were and how she could get to them was not a simple task. Thea wanted to leave home at



once and go to London, where she was certain information would be more easily come by, but Julian talked her into behaving more sensibly, waiting at home, making phone calls, and mapping out a plan of action. Their roles were suddenly reversed, with Julian counselling common sense and Thea impatient and emotional. She noticed this, but distantly, without concern.

One day she heard on the news that a sort of alien embassy, where would-be translators were examined, had been opened in Bergen. Thousands of people were expected to arrive there within the next few days. Those who passed the examination were allowed to go away to the north to live with the aliens. Those who did not – those who had lied or faked their way so far – would not. There were a great many of those, it seemed: people who wished they had been called, and so faked the stigmata of the translator. Didn't they know that they'd be found out? Thea felt contempt for them. They had not been called, so why should they pretend? They made life harder for everyone else, they made the establishment of embassies and tests necessary. It was still possible for any ordinary European citizen who could pay the fare to fly direct to Norway, but there was no telling how long that freedom would last. To cope with the sudden influx of human pilgrims and the potential threat of the aliens, visas and travel restrictions might come into force at any moment. She knew she could not risk waiting any longer.

She turned away from the television set, already sorting out her luggage in her mind. "I have to go now," she said. "I won't wait any longer."

Julian drove her to London's Heathrow Airport. He

wanted to accompany her to Norway but, during the long, slow drive across the country, crawling along the congested motorway, she got him to agree that this was a bad idea. It would be a wasted trip for him, an unnecessary expense. He would not be allowed past Bergen. If the aliens accepted her, he would have to return alone; if the aliens turned her away, well—

“You will come back if they don’t need you?”

It was thinkable. If they didn’t need her. If she was wrong. If what had happened to her on the mountain had not been communication but aberration, synapses misfiring in her brain, a minor fit, *petite mal*. If she had the ability, but not enough of it. If they rejected her because she wasn’t good enough. Because they had sufficient translators already. The very idea was enough to dry her mouth and make her hands and feet go numb. To be rejected. Not needed. Unnecessary.

“You know I still need you, Thea. As much as ever. Maybe more. I don’t want you to go. But since that’s what you want—”

“Not what I want, what I have to do; I’ve told you!”

“Yes,” he said, humbly. “But if it doesn’t work out, for whatever reason—you will come back?”

“If they don’t need me, I’ll come back.” She said that because it was what he wanted to hear, because she owed him that much, at least. But she knew this life was over for her. No matter what happened in Norway, she could not come back.

Thea switched off the radio. The endless chatter was getting on her nerves. So was the traffic. They had not moved an inch in ten minutes. She longed to be somewhere else, away, out of this life of petty frustrations, meaningless tasks and wasted time. Why couldn’t the aliens have plucked her off the mountain-side when they first came? They had touched her, marked her, changed her—why had they not simply taken her? Didn’t they have the power? Why should she have to struggle and seek them, step by ordinary, tiring step? She sighed, and switched the radio on, this time to a different station.

Heathrow was a nightmare of crowds and confusion, heat and noise and discomfort.

Although she had a reserved seat on a charter flight scheduled to leave Wednesday at 16:00—and had arrived three hours in advance of that—by Thursday at 20:00 Thea was still waiting. Julian, of course, insisted on waiting with her, although she begged him to go. The wait would be easier without him. She really only minded the crowds and discomfort for Julian’s sake. The longer he stayed the more he would have to pay for parking fees, the more they spent on the over-priced airport food—expenses they could ill afford. For Thea, money no longer mattered. But Julian would have to support himself without her help. She told herself that he would manage. He was an adult, and, no matter what either of them had wanted to believe, he didn’t need her to look after him. But she went on thinking about his problems, worrying about them for him, out of habit. His presence—even now, asleep beside her—kept her trapped in her old life more surely than the endless delays which kept her grounded.

Across the crowded concourse, she saw a woman reading the *Times Literary Supplement* and recognized the cover: it was a month old, the issue which contained that scathing review of Julian’s latest book. She

moved slightly in her hard seat, shifting position to block his view if he should wake. She didn’t want him to see it in case the reminder depressed him again. She remembered the review—certain phrases struck like darts—but she recalled it without anger, with the objectivity of one who is not involved. Was the criticism really completely unfair? Might there not be a grain or two of truth which made certain phrases sting so? Maybe his most recent poems were a little tired, a little too easy, his anger and cynicism something of a pose...Of course Julian had to take criticism personally, but why should she? Even if critics or the public in future decided that Julian Doone was no true poet but merely someone whose words had been briefly fashionable, that could not affect her? Even if she had been mistaken in his talent, she had loved him truly. She had done what she had done, and lived as she had for love.

People around her were muttering and stirring. She heard her flight called at last. She kissed Julian on his grizzled cheek. “Goodbye,” she whispered, as his eyelids fluttered. “Goodbye, my own love.”

Could everyone on this crowded plane be a translator? Was it possible they all shared the same secret, that all these strangers felt exactly as she did? If so, would the aliens really accept them all? Thea didn’t know what to think, but the atmosphere—a peculiar, heady compound of elation and peace—made her certain that all here were pilgrims; there were no tourists or business travellers on this flight.

She noticed one woman accompanied by two little girls, and wondered what would happen to the children. Why hadn’t that woman made arrangements for their care? Did she imagine she could continue to be their mother while serving the aliens? Didn’t she know—

Know what? Take-off pushed her back in her seat and seemed to push a confused clutter of thoughts out of her mind at the same time. Thea didn’t know, no one knew, what would happen, how they would live, what would be expected of them. They were all babies, embarking on a new life in innocent faith. They knew nothing. All they had was the memory of an experience unlike any other. All they shared was desire.

Maybe the aliens weren’t real. Maybe they were an hallucination, something humanity had dreamed up out of its collective unconscious. Or maybe they were something more sordid, like the CIA plot Julian had suggested. Maybe they were angels. Maybe they were devils. Maybe what had happened to Thea on the mountainside was not communication at all, but only an aberration of her nervous system, an illness. Did it matter what had “really” happened, or what it meant to anyone else? It had changed her life.

The plane rose higher, above the cloud cover into the glittering blue, towards the sun. For a moment, Thea felt hollow, light, and free, as if she could fly without the help of the plane, without her body. For just a moment, hanging in mid-air between two worlds, between her past and her future, she knew it didn’t matter what happened next.

Lisa Tuttle tells us that the above is a companion piece to her BSFA-Award-winning story in the anthology *Other Edens III* (1989).

The Eradication of Romantic Love

Pat Murphy

An excerpt from: *A Popular History of the Twentieth Century*

Looking back from a contemporary perspective, the pathological nature of Romantic Love seems quite obvious. The most widespread affliction of the twentieth century, the malady that we now know as RLS (Romantic Love Syndrome) cut across all social barriers, infecting individuals of all ages, classes, and social groups.

Those afflicted with RLS were said to be "in love." The wild mood swings characteristic of the disease – the manic euphoria and deep depression, the desperate panics and momentary bursts of joy – were considered to be normal behaviour. As a part of growing up, adolescents endured "crushes" and "infatuations," extreme emotional states that have since been identified as attacks of RLS.

The origins of RLS appear to date to the twelfth century. At this time, poets known as troubadours first sang of Romantic Love or Amor. Prior to this time, love was categorized as either the biological urge to copulate, that is, lust or Eros, or the brotherly love known as Agape. The personal infatuation of Romantic Love was a new development. Foreshadowing our modern understanding of RLS, the twelfth-century troubadours sang of the agony of love, the sickness that doctors could not cure.

Throughout the centuries, there is evidence that some suspected, perhaps on an unconscious level, the true nature of Romantic Love. Poetry consistently describes love as a sickness, noting the symptoms in graphic detail. Some poets even suggest that individuals died of love. Though this may have been true in earlier times, historic records show that the disease was not known to be fatal in the twentieth century, though stress and mental anguish may have driven some victims to self-destructive behaviour. Popular songs of the twentieth century frequently refer to love as a sickness or a drug and allude to the need for a cure.

It was not until very late in the twentieth century that the popular concept of love sickness was supported by scientific evidence. The virus responsible for RLS was first catalogued in 1993 by a group of researchers investigating the AIDS virus. At the time, its discovery seemed unimportant. This, like many other viruses, was regarded as harmless – a benign carrier of genetic information that had little or no effect on the functioning of the human body.

The revelation that the RLS virus distorted human

emotional functioning resulted primarily from the work of one woman: Irene Courton. In 1999, Courton was a pharmacology graduate student at the University of California in Berkeley. Photographs of her show a smiling young woman with blue eyes and golden blonde hair that she wore tied back in a single braid. By the standards of her time, she was an attractive woman. Photographs from her high school and college yearbooks show her cheering for her school team at sports events, attending dances in the company of young men, and engaging in other activities typical of adolescents of that period.

Courton herself seems to have been particularly susceptible to the RLS virus. Her diaries from high school and college recounted a series of "infatuations." In one high-school diary entry, she vividly described symptoms typical of RLS:

"I just can't stand it. Every day, I walk past his house on my way to school. It's a block out of my way, but I just can't stop myself. Just being so close to the place he lives makes me wild. My heart starts pounding faster. My face gets hot, and I feel like I've got a fever. I can't seem to get any air. He's never come out when I'm walking by, but I always think that he might – and that makes me feel crazy, like maybe I should run away or maybe I should run into his arms. In geometry class, he sits behind me – two rows over and one row back. I always know he's there. I can feel him. I know the squeaking of his desk chair when he moves. I can hear his pencil scratching on the paper, and I can't concentrate. My hands are always sweaty and my head is swimming. Maybe I'm coming down with something."

Though Courton's symptoms may seem extreme to the modern reader, comparison with popular literature of the time (most notably romance novels and stories) indicate that such reactions to RLS were quite typical. Perhaps the major difference between Courton and other adolescent RLS victims was her awareness of her own symptoms. The observations that Courton made in adolescence may well have contributed to her understanding of the disease and to her motivation to seek a cure.

Courton's research on RLS began with a fortuitous error during her graduate work in viral analysis. When culturing a sample of her own blood, Courton discovered a preponderance of the RLS virus. As it happened, Courton was, at that time, suffering an attack of RLS, and the virus was active and replicating quickly. She identified the virus as

harmless and dismissed it as unimportant. However, distracted by the mania that often afflicts RLS sufferers, Courton failed to complete the remainder of her lab work correctly. A month later, when the attack of RLS had passed, she repeated the lab. The RLS virus that had been so abundant in her earlier sample was gone.

A minor matter, some might say. But there lies Courton's genius. Her curiosity was engaged. From the charts and graphs in her lab notebooks, scholars have pieced together the story of how Courton linked the presence of the virus to RLS.

In many ways, the RLS virus was similar to the well-known herpes simplex virus. Noting this similarity, Courton devised a modified version of the blood test for herpes. This simple blood test allowed Courton to measure the level of RLS-specific antibodies in an individual's blood, thus providing an indirect measure of viral activity.

In Courton's lab notebook, a simple line graph displays the activity of the RLS virus in her own body over time. Along the x-axis, in her tiny, precise handwriting, Courton noted events in her life. "RH begins work," one notation read. (Researchers believe that the initials RH stood for Robert Hartley, a graduate student who shared the lab with Courton.) The notation "Date with RH" coincides with a sharp increase in viral activity. Activity reaches a high point and plateaus over the following month, a period marked by a series of notations: "Second date," "Sex," "Break-up." After the notation "Break-up" the virus becomes dormant once again. On the page facing the graph, Courton wrote: "Periods of viral activity are always accompanied by extremes of mood—great happiness or great depression."

The pages that follow are more cryptic. The initials ME occur regularly. There is speculation that these initials may stand for Martin Elliot, Courton's thesis advisor.

According to the notes in Elliot's files, he initially disapproved of Courton's efforts to ascertain the function and effect of the RLS virus. During the second year of Courton's research, he reversed his position, arranging to provide Courton with the financial support and equipment that she needed to continue her work. Love letters from Elliot found in Courton's files suggest an explanation for this unexpected patronage. Some scholars have speculated that Elliot contracted RLS in Courton's laboratory. More likely, Elliot's attack of RLS was a natural occurrence, a consequence of the disease-ridden times in which he lived. Whatever the source of Elliot's tragic affliction, it offered positive results, enabling Courton to continue her research and begin the search for a cure to RLS.

Animals proved immune to the ravages of the virus, but the University campus provided Courton with an abundant supply of infected men and women. For cultural reasons, women tended to exhibit the symptoms of RLS more readily than men. Therefore, Courton concentrated her research on female subjects.

Her lab notebooks compare the results of extensive psychological tests that were performed on a control group of women with low blood-concentrations of RLS antibodies and on women in the throes of an RLS attack. Courton's notes explained: "Tests suggest that the activity of the virus dulls the reflexes, interferes with abstract thinking, and diminishes the ability to solve mathematical and logical puzzles. There is strong evidence that the RLS group was consistently distracted by the mania attending their condition."

During the second year of her work, Courton performed weekly blood tests on a group of twenty women, charting the increases and decreases in virus activity. Her graphs and notes summarize the classic course of the disease, noting individual variation.



Generally, the onset of an RLS attack was abrupt, characterized by increased viral activity and a rapid rise in blood-concentration of RLS antibodies. Courton speculated that the RLS virus lay dormant in the cells and that its activity was triggered by the release of the hormone testosterone, coinciding with the arousal of sexual interest. Later research revealed that the triggering mechanism was more complex. Studies have linked it with testosterone, blood sugar levels, and alcohol consumption. Though scientists have yet to determine the exact biological triggering mechanism, they agree with Courton's conclusion that the rapid onset of RLS invariably coincides with the presence of a focus, an individual on which the RLS victim concentrates his or her obsession.

Following the onset of the attack, the pattern of RLS varies with circumstances and with a particular individual's resistance. Removal of the focus can cause a slow decline in virus activity and eventually a return to dormancy. In the continuing presence of the focus, blood-concentration of RLS antibodies generally plateaus for a period. The duration of this plateau depends on the individual. At the low end, this period may be as brief as two weeks. The upper end is, as yet, unascertained. Studies show that some susceptible individuals have maintained high RLS activity for decades, functioning despite the debilitating influence of the virus.

Courton's discovery of a treatment for RLS began with a fortuitous accident. One of her subjects, a woman who had proven susceptible to the virus, was beginning an RLS cycle: concentrations of the RLS antibodies were starting to climb and Courton expected to see a peak in three days time. Unexpectedly, the concentration of RLS antibodies dropped, a startling spontaneous recovery.

Courton questioned the woman exhaustively, searching for a change in her habits or her routine that might have effected this amazing shift. The student, a quiet young woman who lived in the University dorm, could pinpoint only one change. At her roommate's insistence, she had tried a medicinal Chinese tea while studying for finals. Two days prior to her recovery, the student had consumed several pots of tea during a single night of studying.

Extensive analysis and testing revealed the tea's active ingredient to be the leaves of an Indian shrub, *Rauwolfia serpentina*. In Chinese medicine, the herb was used in the treatment of snakebite, insomnia, high-blood pressure, and insanity. Reserpine, the principal alkaloid of the plant, had pharmaceutical value: decades prior to Courton's research, psychiatrists had recognized that reserpine was useful in the treatment of schizophrenia, suppressing the symptoms by depleting the brain's stores of monoamines.

In the year 2001, a tragedy, brought on by Courton's own excessive zeal, cut short her work, leaving it to others to carry on. On February 10, 2001, Courton's own continuing chart showed a sharp increase in RLS activity, clearly the onset of an attack. Below the chart, Courton notes that she began taking reserpine on February 11. She notes her second dose of the drug on February 12, and her third on February 13. The self-administered dosage was dangerously high.

A letter to her mother, written on February 10, con-

tained an admission that helps to explain her willingness to take what she surely recognized as a risk. "I think I'm falling in love," she wrote. "But I don't want to. I don't want to go through this again." She does not identify what she means by "this," but her earlier writings indicate that her previous bouts with RLS had been quite painful.

On February 11, Courton's blood concentration of RLS antibodies began to drop. On February 12 and 13, the decrease continued. On February 14, the blood concentration dropped significantly lower than it had ever been in Courton's years of testing. A culture showed no trace of the RLS virus.

In her lab notebook, Courton made an uncharacteristically emotional notation: "I am free of the RLS virus – perhaps the first human to be free of it in centuries. I can think of past loves clearly now, a strangely unsettling sensation. I am viewing the world from the heart of a glacier, and I see with a merciless clarity, the focus too sharp, the brightness too intense."

There is a gap, as if she thought to stop writing there. Then she continued in a dark bold hand, as if she bore down on the pen much harder than was necessary. "My discovery will change the world. I know this. I should be happy."

Her notes end there. On February 14, Courton died by her own hand through the fatal injection of a euphoric. There is no certainty that she had intended to take her own life. Some have speculated that she was simply attempting to offset the depressive effects of the reserpine and miscalculated the dosage of euphoric required. Others suggest that Courton was a victim of her time. Through repeated exposure to RLS, she had become what the people of the twentieth century called a "Romantic," addicted to the pain and emotional turmoil of RLS. The sudden elimination of the RLS virus from her system, the loss of the heady confusion of Romantic Love, caused her more pain than RLS itself.

We will never know the motivation behind Courton's fatal injection. But we do know that she did see clearly in her last moments: her discovery did indeed change the world.

Because her work had been performed in a University of California laboratory, the University claimed patent rights on Courton's discovery. These rights were subsequently licensed to Johnson & Johnson, which developed the first prescription treatment for RLS. A decade later, over-the-counter medications such as Love-Ease were approved by the FDA. Finally, in the 2020s, the RLS vaccine was developed. In the United States, this vaccine is administered in childhood, protecting all individuals from the debilitating effects of the RLS virus.

Of course, there were repercussions that Courton could not have predicted. In the 2010s, the so-called Love Cults enjoyed a brief popularity. The artificial stimulation of the RLS virus brought cult members to frenzies of euphoria. The largest of the cults, centred around the charismatic figure of a former Olympic weightlifter, was discredited when blood tests confirmed that the cult's leader was himself naturally immune to the virus. (His predominantly female following was not.)

Today, RLS is a thing of the past. But looking back,

we must recognize that RLS shaped the nature of twentieth-century Western culture. Scholars now agree that the cultural shifts that occurred at the start of the twenty-first century resulted primarily from the eradication of this affliction.

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Pat Murphy

Interview by Lisa Goldstein

You use a lot of unusual settings, both in place and time. What attracts you to these settings? How much research do you do?

Well, for one thing – I like to travel. When I'm travelling, I often get ideas for stories – I don't really have time to write while I'm on the road, but I jot down the ideas and get back to them later. I came up with the idea for *The Falling Woman* while I was travelling in Mexico, and I went back to Mexico several times to do research. Research is a great excuse to travel.

I'm intrigued by places that knock me out of my preconceptions about how life should be. Asia is a great place for that. When I came back from my first trip to Nepal, I kept telling people: "Who needs science fiction when we have Nepal?" Things happen there in a different way, at a different pace. I walked out of the Katmandu Guest House one morning, and found that all the cows – the ones that wander the streets – had been painted and decorated with flower garlands. It was a holiday – Laxmil, the festival of the cows.

Travelling in Asia made me realize how provincial a lot of science fiction really is. You know, the aliens that are basically the family next door with green skin. Travelling reminds me of how alien different ways of thinking can be. When I've worked historical settings, I do a great deal of library research. My view of history concentrates on little things, the detritus of everyday life, rather than the doings of politicians and royalty. I like finding

out weird facts. Like: the popularity of the bicycle played an important role in women's liberation; our current pencil lead – a mixture of graphite and clay – was developed by a chemist at Napoleon's request when the British cut off graphite supplies to France; Frederick the Great had to threaten his subjects to get them to grow potatoes; the first refrigerator was built by a man who was looking for a cure for malaria and he thought that cold air might help. That sort of thing. The stuff the history books don't tell you.

The importance of myth and fantasy plays a large part in your writing. Would you say this is a theme of yours?

I'm fascinated by the role that myths play in human culture and by the similarities and differences in myths of different cultures. And of course, I'm intrigued by mythic figures – people who are larger than life, who inhabit a world of power and magic and possibility.

In *The City, Not Long After*, I was consciously working to create a myth of the future. I wanted to show the characters – Jax, Danny-boy, The Machine, and the others – as both human beings and mythic figures. At the end of the book, Jax, Danny-boy, and The Machine make a transition – they become legendary, part of the mythos of the city. I'm fascinated by the relationship between the "real world" and the world of myth and fantasy. And I don't see the boundary between them as firm. Given the right stimulus, you can push your nervous

system into a trance state and ease through that boundary. Depending on the culture you were raised in, you might talk with gods and demons or you might perceive the world in a new way. It depends on how you think about things. It depends on what you believe in.

How important is magic realism to your writing? Does magic realism have a place in the fantasy genre?

Magic realism has become one of those hip and happening terms in the world of art and literature, so I've become a little wary of it. But I guess it's nice to have a label that I can slap on my work when people start whining and complaining that they can't figure out if it's science fiction or fantasy or what.

The aspect of magic realism that appeals to me is the use of a different sort of logic. Western logic – scientific, deductive reasoning – makes use of strict cause-and-effect. This happened, and caused this to happen, which resulted in this. The writers who are called Magic Realists make use of a different sort of logic, which is more like the logic of a dream – this happened and because it was emotionally right, that happened. There are some great examples of this in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. For instance, a man dies, and a trickle of his blood goes down the steps, down the street, up the steps of his mother's house. When she sees the blood, she knows he's dead. Of course, it wouldn't really happen that way. The events make an emotional sense, not a logical sense,

Pat Murphy's most recent book is a collection, *Points of Departure*, which includes her previous Interzone story "His Vegetable Wife" (issue 16) as well as the Nebula Award-winning "Rachel in Love" and many others. Her novel *The Falling Woman* (1987) also won a Nebula Award, and has been followed by the highly praised *The City, Not Long After* (1989). She lives in San Francisco, as does fellow award-winning novelist Lisa Goldstein, who interviews Pat below.

and that appeals to me.

I think magic realism has a place in both fantasy and science fiction. Science fiction is, to some extent, creating the myths of the future. And magic realism is, in many ways, the literature of myth.

There's a vocal element in science fiction that claims characterization is unimportant in a science-fiction story – that the ideas are what's important. What do you think about this?

It depends on the science fiction. In the sf that I like to read, characters are very important. If I don't care about the characters, I won't read the story. Now, don't get me wrong – I don't have to like the characters. But the characters have to intrigue me, catch my attention, engage my interest. In a story about the effects of technology on society, I'm more interested in the people than the technology. So, in my own work, I am concerned with creating interesting, well-rounded characters.

It's kind of funny – as a sort of experiment recently, I tried to write a story that had no characters. Bruce Sterling and I had been talking about stories and characters – he suggested I try writing a particular story with no characters. I took that as a challenge and wrote the story "The Eradication of Romantic Love." By my count, there are no characters in it really, but Bruce claims that there are. And I guess he's right. One character did creep in. I couldn't stop myself.

But as I said at the start: the importance of characterization depends on what kind of science fiction you're talking about. A while ago, I went back and tried to reread a lot of the sf that I had loved the first time I read it, when I was a kid. I couldn't read it. The characters were wooden, stick figures; I didn't give a damn about them. But when I first read this stuff, I really loved it; I must have filled in or ignored the lack of characterization.

So I haven't quite figured it out yet. I know that for my work and for my current reading, characterization is vital. And I can't help thinking that those stories I loved when I was growing up would have been better if the characters had been better realized. But at the same time, I recognize that for some people, including an earlier version of myself, characterization is not all that important. So who the hell knows.

How do you respond to people who say your female characters are more sympathetic and come off better than your male characters?

Well, if I'm feeling rude, I tell them to piss off. If I'm feeling more polite, I might say something non-committal like "So what?" and then go get another drink.

Actually, I think that I have written a number of very sympathetic male characters. Danny-boy in *The City*, Not

Long After is quite sympathetic. And my first novel, *The Shadow Hunter*, is told from the point of view of a Neanderthal man. The novel in which the boys get shorter shrift is *The Falling Woman*. What really bugs me is when people (strangely enough, always men) complain that the male characters in *The Falling Woman* all have fairly minor roles. And to that, I just say "Too damn bad." *The Falling Woman* is a mother-daughter story, and the mother and daughter are the focus. The world has plenty of father-son stories, and I've heard very little criticism of the lack of important

gies I've had a hell of a time. I kept thinking about trying to fit into the theme, and consequently thinking about the completed book and the readers and what they would think of this and that – and I froze completely. So I don't think much about market. That decision isn't an artistic one – it's necessary for my own survival.

How do you manage to juggle writing and another nearly full-time job? Has your work at the Exploratorium helped your writing?

Sure, it's helped. On the most basic level, it keeps me afloat financially so that I can write what I like, rather than



Photo of Pat Murphy by Esther Kuttick

women characters in those books. My ultimate response to that sort of criticism is simply – "Well, I guess I didn't write that book for you." Who did I write it for? For all the people – both men and women – who are interested in seeing women in different roles and in exploring the world from a female perspective.

How important are marketing considerations when you write?

Not very. That's one reason that I keep my regular job. I don't want to be governed by the dictates of the market. The very thought of it makes me nervous. I write stuff I want to write and stuff I think I would want to read. Thinking about what other people might want just throws me off. The few times that I've tried to write for theme antholo-

worrying about market. The Exploratorium is also a wonderful resource to have available. For those who don't know the place, the Exploratorium is a museum of science, art, and human perception, founded by Frank Oppenheimer back in 1969. The exhibits and artworks are almost all interactive: the visitor has to experiment and fool around with stuff. You can't walk around the Exploratorium with your hands in your pockets.

The staff at the Exploratorium is an eclectic group. On the staff, we've got playwrights and novelists and poets and sculptors and composers and physicists and mathematicians and machinists – and other artists and scientists come to visit. So one day, I can go to a lunchtime seminar on animal

navigation – how migratory birds figure out where they're going; the next day a noted anthropologist will be talking about learning and culture; the following day a singer who works with tape loops will be doing a demonstration. So it's always interesting. When I need to find an expert on something, I can usually find one at the Exploratorium. For instance, right now I'm working on a story set at the Martian North Pole, and I'm consulting regularly with Paul Doherty, a physicist who works at the Exploratorium. He's very knowledgeable on the subject and isn't at all bewildered when I ask peculiar questions.

Have you always been a writer? How did you get started?

No, I wasn't one of those annoying people who started writing as soon as they were out of the womb. I read voraciously when I was growing up, but it never occurred to me that I could be a writer. I used to tell people that I was going to be a nurse. I had the impression – from the standard writer hype, I think – that writers were these God-like creatures, blessed with some divine knowledge that I knew I didn't have. So it never occurred to me that I could be one.

Then when I was in college, a literature professor told me that I wrote very well. No one had ever told me that before. It was as if I had suddenly been liberated; I gave myself permission to write. I started writing short stories in my second year of college – science fiction, mostly – and sending them out to markets. I vowed that I would send out stories until I either sold one, or had a hundred rejection slips. I sold a story after maybe ten rejection slips. So I was hooked. Of course, I didn't sell another story for two years, but there was no turning back. Two years later, I finally sold another. Two years after that, I sold a third. And then, finally, I started selling fairly regularly. **What advice would you give to someone just starting to write?**

Write. Don't talk about writing; don't bitch about rejection; don't hang out and play at being a writer – get in there and write. Oh, you can do all those things if you like, but don't think that doing those things has much of anything to do with being a writer. Being a writer means you write. And it means that you send stories out – sometime you send them out again and again and again. That's just the way it is. I'm always amazed by beginning writers who tell me: "Well, I sent the story out to two places and it didn't sell, so I put it in the drawer."

When I was starting out, I tried to shift my attitude. Selling a story seemed to be an unreasonable goal for a while there, so I invented a new goal. My goal was to have as many stories in the mail at the same time as possible. The way I figured it, each story in the

mail was a potential sale. To achieve this new goal, all I had to do when a story came back was drop it in the mail again. That I could manage. Some of my stories sold to the twelfth editor who looked at them. And I think some of those are fine stories. I just had to find the right editor.

You know, another thing I would suggest for a new writer: enjoy the process. Henry Miller once said, "Don't be nervous. Work calmly, joyously, recklessly on what ever is in hand." There seem to be a lot of writers out there who find the process of writing very painful. I think part of that may come from the writing mythos, the hype about being a writer. People think writing has to hurt. I don't really understand that. If I didn't enjoy writing, I wouldn't do it. Oh, sometimes I get stuck on something and there's pain involved, but that's part of any creative task. When I finally get unstuck, the pleasure more than compensates for the pain. So as much as possible, I suggest that new writers write things that make them happy, things they enjoy.

Should authors just entertain, or is it part of their job to educate or make a political point?

To be honest, I don't think it's possible to "just entertain." One way or another, every story makes a political point. Sometimes it's blatant and sometimes it's buried, but the author's biases always shine through. Those buried political points are what makes fiction such a sneaky way of messing with people's minds. I realized when I was in high school that I had been quietly accepting as true things that were true in the context of a story. I was reading a Heinlein story and I suddenly became aware that I disagreed with all of the characters. I disagreed with the very world he was describing. I don't mean the physical world – I mean the emotional and political landscape. Clearly, Heinlein didn't live in the same world I did. I'm a little embarrassed that it took me so long to catch on, but there it is. I suppose my slowness was the result of the mindset I talked about earlier – the notion that writers are blessed with some sort of divine knowledge. I was a very trusting reader.

Having realized that I disagreed with Heinlein's politics – even when he wasn't overtly talking about politics – made me realize the difficulty of writing anything that was politically empty. Take *The Falling Woman*, for instance. I didn't set out to make a political point; I didn't set out to write a feminist novel. I wrote a novel about the world as I see it, about a world with active women who are trying to make sense of their world. Yet some people see it as a feminist novel – simply because it has strong women characters.

I think as writers, it's important to think about the points we are making in our books. To realize the insidious nature of our craft; to recognize our ability to worm our way into people's minds. But I don't think we can decide to leave politics out of a book. Like it or not, politics is a part of everything.

(Pat Murphy)

Lisa Goldstein

Interview by Pat Murphy

In *The Red Magician*, you drew on your own family background for the novel. How did your family react to that?

My mother used to tell me stories about growing up in Hungary. When she read *The Red Magician* she said she was surprised that I'd remembered them. I was amazed she said that, because I'd thought the stories were fascinating – her village seemed so far away it had the quality of a place in a fairy tale, but it had existed in the twentieth century. And I don't think anyone could forget the stories she told about being in the concentration camps. Later I asked her to write her experiences down, and she told me she didn't have to – that I had done it for her. That made me feel great, of course, but I still want her to write them down.

In *The Dream Years*, you write about the Surrealist movement, using Andre Breton and others as characters. What sort of research did you do before writing that novel?

I did very little research for *The Red Magician*, a lot more for *The Dream Years*, and a hell of a lot for the novel I'm working on now, which is set in London in the late sixteenth century. I can see this as geometrical progression – the next novel might never get written because I'll be spending all my time in the library. When I get interested in a period, as I did with the surrealists in Paris in the twenties, I spend a lot of time reading about it just for pleasure. It doesn't feel that much like doing research. Sometimes I realize that this is a part of my job, going to the library and reading about Elizabethan spies and counterspies, and I can't imagine having a better one. **How much liberty did you allow yourself when you were writing *The Dream Years*? How closely did you stick to the historical record in developing the characters? Do you think you'll try making use of historical figures in future works?**

I stuck as closely as I could to the facts known about Breton and the others.

Thinking about it now I almost can't believe my gall in writing about these people, some of them still alive when I wrote the book. Since then I've realized that an author has a responsibility to the historical figures he or she uses as characters. I think my attitude changed when I read a book called *Alice at 80* by David Slavitt, which portrays Lewis Carroll as a child molester. There is some evidence that he might have been, but certainly not enough to justify this sort of book. And if he wasn't (and I don't think he was) then writing a book like this is an appalling thing to do. It doesn't matter that all the people involved are dead.

On the other hand some historical figures led lives which were so interesting you almost can't believe they actually happened, they read so much like fiction. It's that sort of thing which makes me return to historical figures as characters, that and an incurable nosiness about what people were really like. But I'm being a lot more careful this time around.

The country Amaz in *Tourists* has a wonderfully unexpected quality, a sense that anything might happen. What inspired Amaz? Is it based on any country in particular?

When we both went to the Yucatan – you to research *The Falling Woman* and me just for the vacation – I fell asleep on a bus going between Cancun and Merida. When I woke up I felt completely disoriented, unsure of just where in the world I was. I think this is central to the experience of travelling, that weird, uncertain feeling that anything at all might happen. If Amaz is based on anything it's based on Merida in Mexico, though it has aspects of other countries too, and I was careful never to explain exactly where it was.

I know that you started by writing the short stories "Tourists" and "Death Is Different." Did you ever plan to include those stories in the novel?

I did include them, but various people who read the first draft told me they didn't fit.

Do you think you'll write any other stories set in Amaz?

Not really. But I do have an idea for a story about a refugee from Amaz who opens up a restaurant in the United States. Since no one in this country know what the cuisine of Amaz is like he can serve anything he wants.

In *Tourists*, the stories that the people in the city tell each other have the quality of folk tales, where things make a kind of sense, but not a logical sense. I'm thinking in particular of the story about the man whose wife becomes a bird and flies away. Did you consciously model those stories on a folk tradition?

The stories weren't modelled on folk tradition, but I was trying for exactly that sort of atmosphere, where things

make a kind of sense but not our kind of sense. I was trying to write magic realist stories, where the unifying force of the story is poetic, based more in images than logic. Maybe magic realism has replaced the folk tale, now that people think they're too sophisticated for folk tales. Magic and irrationality have ways of showing up even when folks think they've outgrown them.

In *The Dream Years*, the city of Paris is a vital part of the story. And in *Tourists*, the city is almost another character in the story, dictating the movements and the success of the human characters. Does this reflect a preoccupation with cities on your part?

I think it must, though I never thought of myself as preoccupied with cities until I read the question. My next book takes place in a city too. It might be because I grew up in a city – Los Angeles – though not one with much character. I'm always amused when modern urban writers give us one more novel about quests through forests and mountains. It's clear that these people have never been in a forest in their lives, just as it's clear that Tolkien, for example, knew this sort of setting intimately.

Also there are a lot of things going on in cities. Paris in the twenties was filled with fascinating people who must have passed each other on the streets or sat at neighbouring tables in cafés even if they didn't know each other. With so many people in one place new ideas, new ways of thinking, new art forms develop.

One of the things I really liked about *Tourists* was the use of a dysfunctional modern family in a fantasy setting. That sort of juxtaposition isn't common in fantasy. How did that come about?

I was trying to show that no one really knows what anyone else is really like, that people you think you know intimately – people in your own family – can be as strange and unfamiliar as foreign countries are. Almost everyone in the family in *Tourists* speaks a different language, one of them an imaginary language, and one of the characters realizes that everyone is a tourist in other people's lives.

As a woman writing science fiction, do you feel any pressure to write about or avoid certain themes?

I try to put women in the historical novels I write, which is difficult because generally it's the men who end up in the history books. *Dream Years* has very few women characters because I thought when I wrote it there were no women surrealists. After I finished *Dream Years* a book came out called *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, and it turned out that there had been women who had been working with the surrealists all

along – they just hadn't made it into the official histories of the movement.

Now I'm trying to be conscious of this. In researching the latest novel I found an Elizabethan woman who had taken over her husband's printing and bookselling business after her husband had died, and I immediately wondered what that would have been like. Would she have had problems being a woman in a profession where everyone else was a man? Would the men have accepted her? Would she have had problems because she was single?

The difficulty, of course, is trying to stay true to your feminist ideals while writing about real people with real flaws and problems – trying to create a woman who is not an unbelievable superwoman. I think I used to be guilty of using writing as a forum for my political ideas, but in recent years I've begun to move away from this – I've started to think that the function of a story-teller is to tell stories. But I'll probably slip my ideas in there somewhere.

Are you conscious of any themes that run through your work?

My writing seems to champion fantasy over fact, the irrational over the rational. Strange things are always happening to my characters, especially characters who are sure they know all about the "real" world. And yet if you asked me what I believed I'd have to say that I think most supernatural experiences have rational explanations, and that I certainly wouldn't want to live without some of the benefits of science and logic. I think what I'm trying to do is create a balance, point out that there's another way of looking at things, a right-brained way, I guess you'd call it, instead of a left-brained way. If we lived in an age of superstition I might try to champion logical thought processes. Part of what fascinates me about the Elizabethan period is that that's when the change started – when people first started questioning received wisdom and thinking about scientific methods.

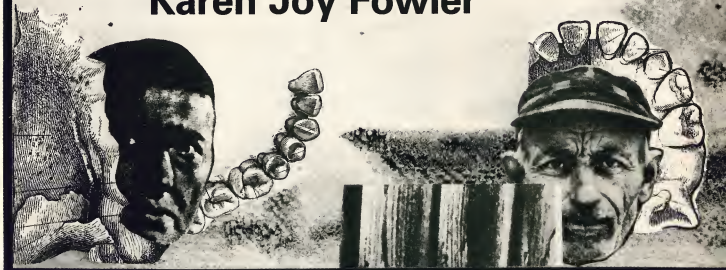
Someone recently pointed out to me another theme in my writing – that there are a lot of displaced people in my books, people who come from another country or another time, or who are caught in something they don't really understand. Part of this might be because my parents were immigrants – my mother from Hungary and my father from Germany – and I got used to seeing things from different perspectives.

Do you consider yourself a science-fiction writer? How would you categorize the sort of fantasy you write? (Or would you categorize it at all?) Is there a modern school or trend that you see yourself fitting into?

Every time I've thought I knew what

Sarah Canary and the Mermaid

Karen Joy Fowler



In 1873, the year of the Rooster, the Territorial Government of Washington asked for a Chinese railway worker to hang an Indian for them. The Indian had murdered a Chinese cook. The Territory hoped to avoid Indian trouble for the white settlers by persuading a Chinese man to act as hangman, leaving the white race out of it altogether. The novel *Sarah Canary* begins with this historical incident.

By Chapter Six, Chin Ah Kin has not only hanged Tom, the Indian, he has also kidnapped a mysteriously incoherent white woman, Sarah Canary, from the Steillacoom Asylum for the Insane and, in the process, inadvertently picked up B.J., a young lunatic. They are in the process of escaping from Steillacoom when they spend the night in the forest with Burke, a naturalist, and his guest, Harold.

Burke's cabin was a single room obviously built in some haste. The floor was dirt. The walls were wood. Any gaps had been blocked with mud and occasionally with fists of crumpled paper. A rock-stick-and-mud fireplace filled one half of the room and any number of shadowy items swam in and out of focus in the light of the flickering fire: bird's nests, feathers, blown eggs, rocks with the skeletal outlines of fish stamped into them, chains of dried leaves, corked bottles with severed paws inside, pine cones and seed pods. Chin might have just stepped into a Chinese pharmacy. Even the smell was familiar, a mixture of spicy leaves and dead fish and formaldehyde. In one corner, a larger item showed mysterious curves through an old brown blanket.

A man was already seated in the cabin when they arrived, tending the fire. The flames flickered in his eyes and a large, black moustache curled over his cheeks. He was clearly surprised and displeased to see them. "The gentleman warming the hearth for us is Harold," Burke said. "A business associate of mine. Harold, this is B.J." He deposited B.J. onto the floor next to the fireplace. B.J.'s eyes were open and he forced himself to sit up.

"A pleasure," said B.J. "Really." He coughed wretchedly. The fire sputtered and sighed in the fireplace.

"Now I'm going to get you a whiskey, B.J.," said Burke. "Miss Anna Blue doesn't approve of drink. It's sort of a sticking point between us. But even she would concede that something stiff is required at times. For medicinal purposes. We'll get the blood running through your veins again. We'll see the roses bloom in your cheeks before the night falls." The bottle rested softly on a stack of pelts. "There's a glass somewhere," said Burke. "Give us a moment." He removed a lizard skin and a seashell from a wooden crate, peered into the bottom and then replaced them. "Isn't this always the way?" He picked up a sketch of several different curvatures of bird beak and looked underneath. "For weeks at a time I don't see another living soul. Then I have more company than chairs." Chin looked around the cabin. It contained no chairs at all. "I have more company than glasses. I can't make you all comfortable. I can't even complete the introductions. I don't know the name of your lovely companion."

"Her name is Sarah Canary," said B.J. "Because she sings like an angel."

"Lovely," Burke repeated. "Perhaps she'll sing for us later. When we've settled in a bit we'll be in the mood for a song. Something light-hearted and romantic. Something about love." Holding the bottle upright above his head, he bowed to the corner where Sarah Canary sat huddled. "You can't know what a rare treat a woman's voice would be. Are you cold, madame?" He set the bottle down, picking up Chin's bedroll which he undid without asking, shaking out the blanket and hanging it gently over Sarah Canary's shoulders. "The poverty of the room becomes an embarrassment to me when a lady such as yourself graces it. If there is anything I can do to increase your comfort, you've only to ask."



He turned back to his skins and pods. "Ah!" he called out in triumph, brushing aside three long black feathers and revealing a small glass. He up-ended it, tapping on the bottom until three dead moths fell out. "I knew it was here somewhere." Uncapping the bottle, he poured a finger of whiskey into the glass. He took a long pull himself on the bottle's mouth, crossed his legs and sank to the floor. He passed the glass to B.J. and the bottle to Harold. "Let's drink to the great naturalist Louis Agassiz. He gave us the ice ages. And I understand he's failing now. Drink to his health."

Outside, the sky darkened abruptly and a heavy rain began to blow against the western wall. An occasional drop fell down the chimney and boiled away instantly with a sound like a snake. Chin slid to the floor and sat on his heels, exhausted. No moon tonight, Tom, he thought. Not here. Maybe where you are.

Chin was lucky to be inside. He was a lucky man. "We still haven't heard your Chinaman's name," said Harold and his tone reminded Chin that luck was, after all, only an illusion in a transient world.

B.J. sipped his whiskey and looked confused. "I guess I don't know his name. I'm sure I knew it once. I must have forgotten." No one else spoke. Burke drank.

Harold poked at the fire. "John?" he suggested. "Every Chinaman I've ever known answered to John."

"Chin," Chin said finally. "My name is Chin." The wind and the rain obliterated his answer. The three men sat and looked at him uncomprehendingly. "Chin," he shouted. The wind dropped just before the word. He shouted it into a sudden silence.

"Chin," B.J. agreed in a tone which suggested there was really no need to shout. "Of course, Chin. A cook."

"They're on their way back to Steilacoom," said Burke.

"Possibly." Chin spoke quickly before B.J. could. "Our plans are not definite."

"You're an odd bunch to be wandering the woods with no definite plans," said Harold. He seemed to wait for an answer. The wind came up again, but with less force. The rain tapped on the wall outside.

"Do you think so?" said B.J. agreeably.

Sarah Canary crept forward on her knees. She seized the uneaten bread which had fallen out beside Chin's dishes on the floor, retreating quickly back into her corner. Holding the bread in one hand, she tore at it with her teeth. The dead flower slipped from her hair onto her lap. She made a sound deep in her throat.

Burke and Harold watched her curiously, passing the bottle of whiskey back and forth. The heat of the hike began to leave Chin's body and he wished for some of the liquor. Since coming to Golden Mountain his uncle had acquired a taste for tiger whiskey, whiskey with the colour and bite of a tiger. Chin also had grown to like the drink. How many weeks had it been since he'd had any? Seattle. Not since Seattle.

Burke's whiskey washed against the glass and glowed in the light. When the fire was directly behind the drink, a mirage of flames appeared inside the bottle. "Would you be offended if I offered you whiskey? You had a long walk today." Chin turned, but Burke was speaking to Sarah Canary.

There was no reason to keep Sarah Canary's condition a secret. And even if there had been a reason, there was no way to do so. Chin cleared his throat. "She doesn't talk."

"Yet she sings?" Burke looked thoughtful.

"I haven't heard her sing," said Chin.

"Sounds, but not words, perhaps?" Burke turned to B.J.

"That must be it." B.J.'s glass was empty. He held it out for more.

Burke took the glass, refilling it. He rose to his feet and offered it to Sarah Canary who looked passively back at him. She hummed a little, through her nose. "It's all right," Burke said softly. He put the glass on

the floor by her feet. "Go ahead, my darling."

Sarah Canary reached for the glass. She picked it up and sniffed. She took an experimental sip. Her lips twisted, disappearing and reappearing as her mouth worked. Then she spat the whiskey back into the glass. Burke retrieved it and returned it to B.J. who raised it to his lips, then caught himself and lowered it again.

"How long have you known her?"

"Since morning," said B.J.

"Two days," said Chin. "I found her in the woods two days ago."

"Interesting," Burke took another drink.

"Interesting," Harold agreed. "So you - adopted her." An unpleasant smile curved his mouth upwards in opposition to the moustache.

Chin tensed. "I am trying to help her." He spoke quietly to avoid giving offence and kept his face still. He had made the mistake of becoming visible. As long as Burke and Harold had thought of him only as B.J.'s Chinaman, they had hardly thought of him at all. Now he had given them something to think about. The fire flickered behind Harold like an extra inch of flaming hair all around his head. Harold stared intently at Sarah Canary. Chin looked at Sarah Canary, too, and then at B.J. and then at Burke. He had no friends in this room. It was an important thing to remember.

Harold was helping to remind him. "I haven't known many Chinese," said Harold. "But I would have said that the race has a gift for self-interest." He shifted his position to make it clear that he was speaking to Burke and to B.J. and not to Chin. "I drank once with a man who supervised a Chinese crew on the railroads. He told me about an accident he'd seen. They were tunnelling with dynamite and a charge didn't go. They sent a Chinaman in to relight it, but the charge had only been delayed. Took both his legs right off. So he lay there, screaming and covered with blood and his legs were the whole distance of another man away from his body. But none of the other Chinese workers would help him. They kept carting out the baskets of rock like they didn't even see. They had to be ordered to tend to the victim. They had to be promised that any time they took would be compensated the same as if they were working, before they would do anything to relieve him. Damned inhuman, if you ask me."

Chin kept his eyes down and his mouth shut.

Harold was unaffected. "This Chinaman, of course, is different. He sees an abandoned white woman and he just wants to help her. It's very good of him."

Burke spoke. "Your English is remarkable, Chin."

Chin did not look up. "Thank you."

"Remarkable. How long have you been here?"

"Three years only," said Chin. He resisted the impulse to provide more details, to tell them he had learned English back in China and that he also spoke German. He tried instead to divert attention from himself with a deft change of subject. "You study nature, then," he said to Burke. "Have you ever heard of a kind of bird with only one wing? Do you think such a thing could be?"

"No," said Burke. "Nature being fond of symmetry. And partial to pairs. Two eyes, two arms. Two sexes."

"One head," said B.J. as if he were agreeing. "Five fingers."

A moment's silence followed and then Burke laughed abruptly. "You've put me in mind of the legless Birds of Paradise. Have you heard this tale? Stop me if you have." He paused only briefly before continuing. "Well, it's a bit of joke on us, really. The first naturalists in South America sent back beautiful specimens they called the Birds of Paradise. Lovely birds with no legs. The scholars in London were beside themselves, contemplating the lives of the airy creatures, eating and mating and sleeping entirely on the wing. They wrote papers of praise. Later they learned the legs had simply been cut off to make the birds fit in the boxes for the mail. Oh, it was a great embarrassment all the way round." Burke laughed again and handed the bottle of whiskey to Chin. "Drink up," he suggested. "Drink to Paradise and the legless birds who live there."

"Thank you," Chin said, inclining his head slightly. The bottle was wet on the outside of the neck where Chin grasped it and the dirt on his hands turned to mud. He took an especially long swallow, a tiny celebration of Burke's approval, though how he had won it he wasn't sure. The whiskey was harsh; tears came to his eyes and his nose filled. He wiped his fingerprints off the bottle with his sleeve and handed it back to Burke who passed it to Harold. Harold cleaned around the mouth with his cuff before he drank again.

"Chin, I want to show you something," Burke said. Swinging his legs around, he reached into a box behind him, sorting through several stoppered jars. "Are you familiar with these?" The jar he handed Chin contained a single small stone. "I bought this off a man in San Francisco who said he got it off a Chinese boatman in Hong Kong. I'd like to get another. Have you seen such things?"

"It's medicine," said Chin. "It's a dragon's tooth. A very good one. Lung tse. Very valuable."

"You Chinese use that name for any fossilized tooth. But this tooth is rather peculiar. You see how the internal slopes have filled the intervening valleys so that the surface is nearly flat? Leaving it only a few fissures and those are particularly narrow. You would expect this kind of wear on a human tooth. Homo sapiens. But the tooth is far too large to be human. It comes from some animal which lives in China. Human-like, but gigantic. What could it be?"

"An ape?" Chin suggested.

"Even that's not large enough. And it wouldn't explain the wear. Have you seen other teeth like this?"

"I've seen many dragon teeth," said Chin. "I've never looked that closely. I don't remember another one so large."

"Ah, well," Burke put the jar away behind him. He smiled at Sarah Canary who was noisily finishing her bread. She smiled back. "Droop," she said. "Whulp. La."

"The world is full of mysteries," Burke observed. "And a very good thing, too. Harold, here, makes quite a little living from the world's mysteries. Don't you, Harold?"

"People have a natural sense of wonder," Harold said stiffly. "I try to provide them with a little oddity now and then. Takes them out of themselves and away from their own troubles."

"Don't apologize," Burke gestured extravagantly,

knocking a book from the top of a crate. His voice was the loudest in the room, louder than the rain which hit the wall with a sound like a thousand stones, louder than the wind which rang like a celestial gong. Wherever Burke sat, Chin felt that the centre of the room shifted to that spot. Harold's movements and speeches were miserly in comparison. B.J. was mouselike. Chin found himself admiring Burke's largeness and loudness. It seemed to him a kind of courage. "We all have to make a living," said Burke. "We all have to do things we can't be proud of." He tipped the bottle straight into the air and gulped. He handed the whiskey to Chin. His face had taken on a drunken redness and Harold's eyes were glassy. Chin took another sip, smaller this time.

"What kinds of oddities?" asked B.J.

"Entertainment," said Harold.

"Carnival entertainment," said Burke.

"Have you ever seen a display of performing fleas?"

B.J. asked. "A woman I knew had been to a carnival and she'd seen trained fleas who could draw water and turn a windmill and fire a cannon all with little silver wires fastened to their necks. She said there was a tiny carriage drawn by fleas and carrying fleas all dressed up inside. Have you ever seen an oddity like that?"

"No," said Harold. "I never have."

"I think it was in England," B.J. said.

Chin's scalp itched and he scratched at it. It itched even more.

Burke turned his head to gaze at Sarah Canary. "Here's a mystery for you. A beautiful mystery. A mysterious woman. You're familiar with the categories of Linnaeus?" Burke asked. "Systema Naturae?"

"No," said Chin.

"No, of course, you wouldn't be. If you were, it might have occurred to you that this is not an ordinary woman you've found."

"I never thought she was an ordinary woman," said Chin.

"And did you ever think that Sarah Canary might well be an example of *Homo sapiens ferus*?" Burke's eyes brightened in excitement. "A wild woman?" He drank recklessly. "Just last year a feral boy was captured near Myneपुरi, India. His name is Dina Sanichar. He's been raised by wolves since infancy like Romulus and Remus. Had to be trapped like a beast himself and dragged in ropes, snarling and spitting, back to civilization. Of course, we have to make a distinction between human children adopted by the animals and taught bestiality and the true *Homo sapiens ferus*. I'm looking at Sarah Canary's rather distinct facial characteristics, the prominent brow, in particular, and thinking she could be either one." He retrieved the bottle from Harold and passed it to Chin.

"The feral child," he continued, "has a natural aversion to intoxicants. Miss Anna Blue would make much of this if she only knew it. I offered a drink to Sarah Canary and you noted her reaction. The feral child does not laugh. Have you ever heard Sarah Canary laugh?"

Chin considered the question. "Yes," he said. "I believe I have. Once or twice."

"Perhaps you mistook a guttural sort of vocalization for laughter. The feral child must be taught to walk upright. Have you ever seen her run on all fours?"



"No."

"Does she not recognize herself in a mirror?"

Chin paused. "Yes," said B.J., sounding excited. "I mean, no. She does not. Well, that settles it, doesn't it? And Dr Carr thought she was a poisoner. Remember, Chin? How she couldn't go into the kitchen?"

"So she has been examined by a medical man?" Burke wiped a dribble of whiskey off his beard with his hand.

"He only had time for a cursory examination." B.J. finally finished his drink, setting the empty glass down and curling onto the floor beside it. He belched softly, laid his cheek over one of his bent arms and closed his eyes. "But he did the mirror test."

"What about the dress?" said Chin. "She was wearing the same dress when I found her."

Burke waved this away with one hand. "Obviously you weren't the first to find her. She has escaped or wandered off from some previous attempt to civilize her. A special course of education is being designed for the Indian boy; naturally, you can't just throw a wolf child into an ordinary school with other children. The process of reclaiming these souls is a very delicate one, best left to an expert. I don't think a true wild man has ever been civilized. It would be a real challenge."

The wind shook the little cabin. Rain pounded on the walls outside and blew into the chimney. Harold got up and added a handful of pine cones and another log to the fire.

"Do you notice that Sarah Canary has your blanket, Chin?" B.J. said sleepily. "What did I tell you?"

"You would start by teaching the names of common objects, of course," said Burke. "Especially those objects whose value would be readily understood by the primitive. Blanket. Fire. Water. In a simple setting. At first, the wild man should deal only with a few other humans and those should always be the same. Perhaps only two. One human to tend to physical needs — cleanliness, food. A second responsible for education. How are most children civilized? Why, within the family, of course. Create a family for the wild man. A mother. A father. Avoid the temptation to move too fast, to overwhelm the wild man with too many faces, too many philosophies. You wouldn't expect the wild man to immediately appreciate opera, for instance, even if that was one of your eventual goals. You wouldn't even take him to church right away. No, the best possible situation would be a sort of bridge between savagery and civilization. A remote cabin somewhere with a very few human companions. A life with elements of the familiar. And then the wild man could be taught to perform certain simple tasks. I'm not talking about tricks here. I mean, we're not talking about a dog."

"We're not talking about a flea," said B.J.

"It would take a great deal of time," said Burke. "A great deal of patience. But so much could be learned on both sides."

B.J. yawned widely. Chin heard his jaw crack. A pine cone burst apart in the fire, sending a small shower of sparks upwards. The sparks were small, brief stars, like those of a firecracker, smaller and briefer than the lives and affections of men. Yet somewhere beyond the clouds and the rain were the real

stars. What did human sorrow matter to the real stars? And was it too implausible to suppose that something even larger existed, that some larger Chin sat and watched the real stars and thought that they were, after all, only a blink in time and tried to imagine something smaller still? Chin made a satisfying ring of this image in his mind, connecting the large and little stars, the large and little Chins. An afterimage of red lights danced above the fire for a moment more. Then the sparks existed only in memory.

"It would be holy work," said Burke. "I truly believe that. God created nature for man and when we study it, whenever we can find the pattern to unravel part of it, what we are seeing then is the mind of God. I can't concede the objections to Darwin. The more pattern, the more perfection."

"What about women?" B.J. asked.

"In what way do you mean?"

"Are women part of the man God created nature for or are they part of the nature God created for man?"

There was no answer, just the wind and the rain, just the fire and the small sound of Sarah Canary's dress as she settled herself onto the floor for the night. Minutes passed. Sarah Canary pulled Chin's blanket over her. She took several deep breaths. Chin turned and looked at B.J. He had stopped trembling and his chest rose and fell in a steady rhythm. "He's gone to sleep," said Chin. "And so has Sarah Canary."

"It's a good question, though," said Burke. "It's one I hadn't thought of. Speaking scientifically, it makes sense to treat women simply as a less highly evolved form of man. Their brains are smaller. They're more delicate, evidence lower levels of metabolism and energy. This works out rather well for men, of course. We can do without them, but I don't think the reverse can be said. Is that answer enough?"

Harold reached for a crumpled blanket on the floor by one of the crates. Another crumpled blanket lay beneath it. He tossed the second to Burke. Wrapping it around himself, Burke stretched out between B.J. and Chin. Harold took a space closer to Sarah Canary. Chin lay down. He slept fitfully, waking whenever his position became uncomfortable. He woke because he was hungry. He woke because he was cold. The rain continued, but the wind had stopped. The fire was out. Burke snored like a beast beside him. B.J. sighed with every breath. Chin rubbed his arms and held himself. He went back to sleep. He woke again when B.J. screamed. "Lord preserve us," cried Burke. "What is going on?"

B.J. was standing in the dim light by the far wall, holding the corner of the brown blanket whose mysterious lumps and folds Chin had noticed when they first entered the cabin. Chin jumped to his feet and joined him. Underneath the blanket, underneath B.J.'s shaking hand, was the black, twisted, and open-eyed face of a dead child.

"What are you doing there?" said Harold sharply. "That thing there is none of your business."

"I was cold," said B.J. "I just wanted the blanket." He looked at Chin, his face white in the dark room. "I wasn't taking it. Nobody else was using it."

"Calm yourself," said Burke. He produced a second bottle of whiskey and picked up B.J.'s discarded glass.

"Calm yourself. Have a drink." He poured again, stepping across the room to join them. He pulled on the blanket gently, but it was frozen inside B.J.'s fist. Setting the glass down, he unwrapped B.J.'s fingers and finished peeling the blanket back. A stale, medicinal odour filled Chin's nose. The little body, topped by the agonized human face, ended in a fish's tail. "What do you think of it?" said Burke. "It's an embalmed mermaid. She comes from the coast of Australia. Australia is a young continent so its fauna is a bit strange." He picked up the glass of whiskey again. B.J.'s hand had not moved; it still clutched and shook in the air above the body. Burke put the glass inside B.J.'s fist and curled B.J.'s fingers around it. "Drink up," he said. When he released B.J.'s hand, the whiskey spilled from the glass.

"I can't," said B.J. "I can't hold it steady enough. Am I here, Chin?"

"Yes," said Chin.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Burke guided the glass to B.J.'s mouth. He tipped it and the liquor ran over B.J.'s chin. "I can't swallow," said B.J.

Chin turned again to the little figure whose face expressed such anguish. She must have died in terror. So much terror that she had, in fact, become terror; her facial expression was more vivid to Chin than her strings of hair, her tiny, exposed breasts or even her unexpected tail. He turned away, queasy, the whiskey shifting in his stomach. He remembered the promise he had made to Tom, to show him something never seen in the world before and how Tom had imagined it would be something beautiful like striped horses. Would Tom have been satisfied with this? Would anyone want to go to his death too soon after seeing such a face?

Harold spoke softly. "Where the winds are all asleep," he said.

"Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,
Where the salt weed sways in the stream,
Where the sea beasts, ranged all round,
Feed in the ooze of their pasture ground;
... Where the great whales come sailing by,
Sail and sail, with unshut eye..." Poetry," he said. "Matthew Arnold."

"I'm sorry to have woken everyone." There was a quiet hysteria in B.J.'s voice, a quality Chin recognized, even as short a time as he had spent in the Steilacoom asylum. It was a tone of voice by what any patient there could be identified. Yes, I'm crazy, it said, but I'm no trouble. Yes, I'm crazy, but look how quiet I am. "Let's just pretend it didn't happen. Let's all go back to sleep now. I liked the poem."

"I don't suppose you're familiar with a book called *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. Of course, you wouldn't be." Burke stood, staring sadly down at the mermaid. "Curious volume. Authorship something of a mystery. But it attempts to explain the monstrous in nature. Uses the metaphor of the railroads - you'll be interested in this, Chin. The idea is that the embryos of all animals begin on the same main line, but take a turning off at some point. Evolution happens because an embryo stays longer on the main line. Monstrous births occur when the turning is taken too early. You get these mixes, like the duck-billed

platypus which is something half-way between a bird and a rat. And this mermaid."

"The mermaid is mine," said Harold. "Burke bought it from a ship's captain in San Francisco and I bought it from Burke and came here to collect it. I plan to exhibit it. It's none of your business."

B.J. returned to his spot on the floor and curled up on his side. "Did you want the blanket?" Burke said.

"Not any more. Cover it up again."

Sarah Canary lay back down in her corner. Chin returned to his spot. He was awake a long time, thinking of Sarah Canary and the mermaid and of Tom. He was never aware of having fallen asleep, but he must have done so, because Burke woke him with a whisper towards morning. Burke had obviously spent the night with the whiskey bottle. His hair pointed in a variety of directions and his eyes expressed the same energetic confusion. The slurring of his speech made him spit on Chin while he talked. The quieter he tried to make his words, the more he spat.

"I'm giving her up," he said. On the "p" a drop of whiskey landed on Chin's left hand. It was filled with tiny yellow bubbles. Chin drew his hand across his sleeve. "My darling Sarah Canary." Burke shook his head. "My angel. I have to give you up. B.J. is right. If you were a man, it might be different. Then we might convince ourselves you had a profitable, productive life ahead. Work. Philosophy. Contemplation. But what can a woman expect? A woman of your age. A woman who can't even eat prettily." Chin wiped spittle off his cheek with one hand and pushed back the hair which had come loose at the sides of his face. He was surprised at his own sense of disappointment. He had not said to himself that perhaps Burke would take Sarah Canary and relieve him of responsibility. He had not said to himself that perhaps Sarah Canary would be safe with Burke. But clearly he had thought it, somewhere deep and unheard inside.

Chin sat up to work more at this conversation. His braid fell forward on his shoulder and he picked it up, held it in his hands, examined it while he tried to concentrate on what Burke was saying. Drunkenness had obliterated many of the hard edges of Burke's words, leaving only the open sounds, the singing. Chin was used to dealing in foreign languages. But liquor imposed a second translation. He had to decipher the drunkenness just to get to the foreign tongue.

"Strutes," said Burke impenetrably. "Struth. You can't teach, my pet. You can't be ornamental. There's little chance you'll marry. It's not a gallant thing to observe, but let's be honest. Unless you'll marry her, Chin. I'd do it myself, but I'm in love with another. Heart's pledged. Godswash." His voice gained intensity and then faded on the last indecipherable word. Chin's breath quickened nervously. Miscegenation was illegal in Oregon. Racial suicide, they called it. In Washington? He couldn't remember. He decided to pretend he had understood none of Burke's words, but even as he made the decision he heard Burke go on. "No. No," Burke was saying. "Please, forget I asked. I promised myself I wouldn't ask."

Burke's eyes flowed with drunken tears. When

Chin's uncle drank he turned a bright red colour all over his face. He became noisy and posturing, like a rooster. When Chin drank, he filled with a hollow kind of laughter, arising from nothing, aimed at nothing. If he emptied himself of it, nothing was what remained inside. Often he laughed so hard he was unable to speak. He had never seen anyone who became moist and abject like Burke.

"Let's have no lies between us," Burke sniffled loudly. "No dissembling. No cunning. No deceit. The truth is that no one has had much luck educating these children. I didn't tell you that, Chin. I concealed the fact. Now I lay it bare. With an adult, there's been even less success. I could work twenty years and only manage to teach her to dress and feed herself. Maybe one or two words which you or I might understand but would have to be explained to anyone else. Maybe she'd be able to comb her own hair. I can't take the responsibility for condemning her to that kind of life. A life in the darkness of a few small rooms." Burke wiped at his eyes and nose.

"It would be a sin," he whispered. "I know that. I know that. And one more sin will be one more than I can rid myself of. The little mermaid – you mustn't tell a soul. I made her for Harold. The top half is monkey. I sort of shaved the fur from it. Added human hair and the breasts. The bottom is just salmon. I was proud of the work, at first. God forgive me. Time and care made her as seamless as one of God's own creatures and I took a reckless pride in that. It seemed a good joke and a little money on the side. I didn't expect the face to turn out that way. Does it haunt you, that face? Tell me she won't haunt you. And then imagine how she haunts me, her father. I'm afraid to sleep sometimes.

"I shouldn't have done it. The study of nature is a kind of holy worship and I've created a perversion, a false idol, a sin against the mind of God. No. Tomorrow," said Burke, "you and I will take Sarah Canary as deep into the forests as we can and then lose her. We will find a lovely spot with a stream and a water ouzel's nest and a host of wild flowers come spring. Anemones and the like. Let her return to the happy, natural life. Let her return to the fellowship of the deer and the wolf. Let her return to freedom and to the God she already knows."

"It's very cold," said Chin.

"Sarah Canary can handle that. Sarah Canary can curl into a hole until the weather turns warm. She can catch fish with her hands and find the early berries. She's as comfortable in the woods as any creature. Aren't you, my angel? Aren't you, my pet?" Burke directed his whisper over Chin to Sarah Canary's sleeping form. Sarah Canary had covered herself with Chin's blanket completely. No part of her face or her hair or her feet could be seen.

She was still that way at dawn. The rain was quiet and steady outside, but Harold had risen early and appeared to be gone for good. The mermaid was no longer lying by the wall and neither was her blanket. Harold's own blanket was gone as well.

Chin stretched, rose, and began the fire for breakfast. Burke's eyes were gummy with sleep and regret and his face sagged. He stirred the porridge, looking

with longing at Sarah Canary's still form. She was drawn into an impossibly tiny ball beneath the blanket. "Perhaps we shouldn't take her out in the rain," he said. "Although it would make it harder for her to follow us back. Wipe out the scent of our tracks and all."

Chin began to eat his own bowl of mush. It was tasteless, but it was hot. He felt hungry and hopeful. He was pleased that Harold was gone. He was pleased that Burke was wavering. Perhaps B.J. would marry Sarah Canary, should such a thing be required. Perhaps he could leave both B.J. and Sarah Canary in Burke's care and consider his duties fulfilled. Perhaps he could still catch up with his uncle in Tenino.

"Wake up, Sarah Canary," said B.J. "Wake up and have breakfast." There was no response. B.J. ladled a bowl of porridge and carried it into her corner. "Sarah Canary," he said. He leaned down, gently folding back the edge of Chin's blanket. The black face of the mermaid stared up at him. "Oh, God," B.J. cried, dropping the porridge which overturned and spilled onto his shoe. "Dear God." He threw Chin's blanket back over the little creature and covered his own face with his hands. Outside the wind came up again. Chin heard its high voice and its low voice and all the unidentifiable voices in between. Women's voices, contrary and confused, but all of them somehow parts of one another.

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Karen Joy Fowler last appeared in *Interzone* with "Game Night at the Fox & Goose" (issue 29). Since then she has completed a novel, *Sarah Canary*, from which the above is an extracted chapter. A publication date has yet to be fixed for that book, but meanwhile her outstanding collection *Artificial Things* (1986) has been reissued in America and is also due to appear in Britain. She lives in Davis, California.

Faking It

Sherry Coldsmith

Amy hung around in the corridor of the penthouse floor, until she could remember which of the six doors belonged to her apartment. The Slice had left her feeling queasy and disoriented. No, not the Slice, she reminded herself; it was a "non-surgical neural re-org." Amy groped in her purse for a key, then remembered that nothing so crude was needed to open the door. But old habits die hard. In three months of living with Barry, she had still not adapted to all the nuances of his life-style, including the palm-scanner beside the front door.

"Good evening, Amy." The House spoke as she stepped into the foyer. Its soothing, con-man voice never failed to get on her nerves. "Barry called and said he will be quite late tonight —"

"Did he say why?" she asked, too shrilly, too abruptly, for House to decode. "Is there more to the message?" she asked, repeating the standard question in a normal tone. Though Barry had said the Slice was a trivial procedure she had still expected him to be home.

"He says that one of his colleagues on the R&D team is getting married in a few days. This is the groom-to-be's last night out with the guys. Barry deeply regrets that he forgot to tell you earlier."

Amy went to the kitchen to get a drink of water but found herself bent over the sink with the dry heaves. I am completely off-line, she thought — that's what Barry would say. All my heads have well and truly crashed.

Nausea quickly gave way to hunger. Amy stripped a package of its silver dinner jacket. Sixty seconds in the microwave. She scooped the food on to her plate, then explored it with her fork — a tortilla rolled around an ambiguous mixture. A stag party, huh? The tortilla lay in the shape of a smile. Amy, you silly young thing, you have just entered the *Enchilada continuum*.

"You forgot," she mumbled drowsily. "Forgot what, team?"

Amy lay in the dark bedroom, anger pushing sleep aside. "You forgot about the Slice." She had spent the evening sprawled in front of the TV, waiting for Barry to come home.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart," he said. "I would've been here if I'd thought it was important. I wouldn't come home if you'd just gone to the gynecologist's, now would I?" Sensing their voices, House filled the room with a hazy red light that Barry had programmed weeks ago. Barry was already undressed and looking slightly wild, as he always looked without his glasses.

He didn't need spectacles, but he wore them, he said, to take the roundness out of his face.

He held her and petted her until she could feel herself relaxing despite her annoyance. Perhaps the Slice hadn't been that much after all, Amy thought. The medic had pointed something called a transmission gun at her head while telling her that Barry had pioneered the Slice, a fact she had been unaware of. Amy was queasy after the medic finished, but she was fine now. She rolled away from Barry and curled into foetal position, intent on claiming as much sleep as possible before she had to get up and go to work in the morning.

But Barry seemed to have other ideas. She could feel his knees digging in to the back of her legs, a hand reaching over her arm for her left breast, and another hand scooting between her body and the bed. Barry whispered "Oh boy!", like a kid who's been told that he's in for a second helping of dessert. She tried to enjoy herself; when that failed, she tried to be convincing.

Later, she sat wide awake in the cathedral-like living room, a brandy in her fist. Instead of reading the magazine she had in her lap, she mulled over her plans for the future. Once she had some proof that the Slice had taken effect — she'd been promised increased typing speeds and the ability to do two things at once — she'd find a new apartment, line up some new roommates, and then pack up her things and go.

Not that there was much to pack up. The room around her, half-lit in the designer shadows that Barry thought so tasteful, was evidence of that. Other than a few art books, there wasn't a thing in the room that belonged to Amy. One of the secretaries she used to work with, a woman who'd been laid off just a month ago, said a house should reflect the unique combination of two people's history and tastes. Amy had tried to convince Barry of this, but like everything else she said, he shrugged it off with disturbing ease.

She dipped her finger in the brandy, then circled the rim of the *ballon*, finding even the whine of crystal preferable to the silence. Back in the first dizzy-with-love days of their relationship, Barry had begged her to move in, and she had done as he asked though she'd only known him a couple of weeks. He said he was a man ready to fold her into his life as effortlessly as he folded her into his arms.

And Barry got what he wanted, a girlfriend who cost him no effort at all. Except for the exertion it took to ignore her when she challenged his wishes. Her

first defeat came when she began to re-decorate his apartment with quilts she had made in art school. They were supple mosaics of silk and cotton, but Barry couldn't bear to let such foolery clash with his decor. And take her grandmother's lace doilies, he had said. They were meant to rest on chairs but did she see anything like a conventional chair in his apartment? Amy had pinned an antimacassar to a seating pod and stood back. Barry was right—it looked ridiculous.

In fact, Barry pointed out, there was nothing she owned that would match his Millennial decor. Hyper-realist accent pieces and expensive birds—he owned a macaw and an African grey—did not go with samplers and log cabin quilts. It took him a few days, but eventually he wore her down. She ended up packing her quilts and sending them off to relatives back in Georgia.

It seemed that the things she loved had no tech-talk translation that Barry understood. He spoke of multi-threaded residuals, fully plexed ports, and something-or-other continuums as if it all meant something. At the office party she had attended, he and his friends huddled together like a football team, a fog of jargon gathering around them. She scarcely knew what Barry did, except that it had something to do with developing androids, a goal that according to him was still years in the future.

Despite all the quarrels, she still wanted him beside her, beneath a quilt she saw in her mind, one that she would like to fling over him, then fold back from his feet the way Ruth had uncovered the feet of Boaz. Barry was always hanging his feet outside the covers—the best way to cool off, he had told her. Amy loved the patches of hair on his back, the trembling of his eyelids beneath her tongue, the warmth of his body on those cold nights when links between the House and the heating system had frayed and broken apart. Amy knew his body well and she was sure that one day, if she stayed with him, she would feel real passion for him, and would not have to fake it as she had tonight.

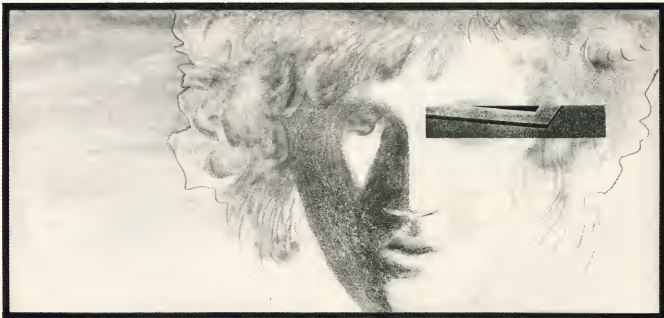
When Amy awoke the next morning, painful sunlight was pouring through the Palladian windows of the bedroom. She tore the sheets from the bed in her hurry to get dressed.

"Barry," said the House, "has phoned to say that he has cleared a day of leave with your line manager." She let out a sigh of relief and instantly felt guilty as well. Barry had been thoughtful, and here she was planning to leave him. Amy got back into bed and cuddled a pillow. There'd be a stack of work waiting for her tomorrow, but she mentally put it aside. If the claims of the medic were true, then she'd whip through her backlog in no time.

Later, she undressed in front of the bathroom mirror, prior to running her bath. She seemed the same petite girl as before, but she knew the Slice was not supposed to have visible effects. Barry had brought home several of the reports his company had written on the procedure... "Thanks to research done at Techumen," the documents had said, "autonomic functions can now be regarded as an organic form of soft-wired mass storage, loadable and self-reprogramming in-flight. It is possible to overlay permeable neural loadspace with function-specific behaviour modalities."

The documents had not been user-friendly but Amy had gotten the gist of them, even without Barry's urgent advocacy of the Slice. He'd been clearly afraid of having an unemployed girlfriend on his hands. Amy was doubly lucky, Barry insisted; the Slice could only be implemented by Techumen personnel, and only secretarial Slices were available. Barry's own secretary had called Amy personally, to tell her how the operation had made her indispensable to Techumen.

"What the hell..." Amy exclaimed. She was already in the bath. Somehow she had set the controls and stepped into the water without realizing what she'd done. She had never been able to turn the bath on without considerable fussing with its knobs and buttons. If the Techumen bath was not first adjusted for body temperature, skeletal structure, fat content, and number of persons, it would not operate at all. Barry had never gotten around to programming the bath for default settings. She let herself go limp in the warm, lavender-fragrant bubbles. Barry said the Slice would improve her performance, and already the procedure was paying off.



After a light lunch, Amy came back to her work-cell and noticed that her in-tray, the one on her desk and the one on the system, was empty. Since she'd had the Slice, six weeks before, she was getting through most of her work in just a few hours.

She punched up a number and a tanned, middle-aged face shimmered to life on her workstation screen. "Hey Millie, they gave me a raise this morning."

"You look surprised, girl," said Millie, grinning. "You must've known it was coming." Amy's reputation as a one-woman workforce was all over the office. "How much was it anyway?"

"Enough. I ought to put a deposit on an apartment. Know anyone looking for a place to live?"

"No, but you can always find somebody." Millie said, a grimace forming in the laugh-brackets around her mouth. "Move out first and think of pinching pennies later."

"Thanks for the advice, but it's not that easy."

"Sure it is. Look, I've got a pile of work to do," said Millie, a little coldly. "I'll ring back later."

It was easy for Millie, Amy thought. Her son lived with her and she'd forgotten what it was like to feel lonely. She knew Millie was tired of hearing about Amy's indecisiveness but Amy did not look forward to the endless trial of finding a decent place to live. If she got another raise, she could probably afford to live on her own.

At least Amy was employable now. She no longer felt like a dinosaur waiting for the comet to hit and wipe out the last of the secretaries. Her typing speed had nearly doubled, and she could memorize reports and then punch them in from memory while she answered the phone. Employees were constantly hanging around her workstation, just to watch the secretary who could type 165 words per minute while she asked about your wife. Millie had found Amy's enhanced performance alarming: "I'd rather quit than let someone screw around with my head," she'd said.

If it weren't for the blackouts that Amy sometimes suffered, she would leave Barry, she really would. Amy drove to work in the mornings without knowing how she got there. She cleaned the apartment without knowing how she'd done it, and she never noticed, when compiling the office accounts, if costs had doubled or halved. When Barry called her up at work, he complained it was like talking to a zombie.

But there were a few chores that didn't cause blackouts. The rote tasks involved in quilting or lacemaking were never troubled by lapses of concentration. Maybe the pleasure of just touching a design, her design, kept her mind fully engaged. Maybe her art required more of her being than she realized, even when she was doing nothing more than sewing one scrap of silk to another.

When the workstation display said five o'clock, she went to a crafts shop a few blocks from her office. It was easy, so easy, to hand over her raise to the sales clerk. The quilting frame could be delivered on Saturday morning. If Barry refused to let her have the guest-room as a studio, then she'd have to move out, if only to find a place to put the massive, eight-by-ten frame.

That evening, Barry gave her the guest-room with a generous smile, saying he meant to make a present of it weeks ago.

"Of course I want you to have that and more," he said. "We're planning something pretty lucrative at Techumen right now. If it comes off, I'd like to buy you a showroom in town, like the one you talked about. You could display your own stuff, bring in other craftsmen... do what you like."

Amy gasped at the offer, more surprised by Barry's timing than his generosity. Every time she thought about leaving him, he gave her new reasons to stay.

The frame was dwarfed by the guest-room's room's cavernous dimensions. Amy hurried upstairs every evening after work, desperate to get away from the chatter of Barry's perpetually on-line TV, impatient to start her real work again. Her studio. After each soulless exchange with Barry, she knew she would have to give it up. And each day, she put off her departure, unwilling to say goodbye to the house that was now hers.

Amy lay in the bed and stared at the candle-like flickering of the bedside lamp. She was unable to work up any response to Barry's dogged licking and sucking. Since the Slice, she had been completely turned off by the thought of sex. Barry had very patiently accepted each refusal, but tonight she had given in, hoping that six weeks of celibacy might help Barry to stir some response within her, some response besides simple joy in touching and being touched. But now that they were in bed she found she just couldn't focus on Barry's presence, despite the intimate probing of his hands. She imagined herself as a Roman courtesan, then as the delicately perspiring belle in a boudoir, then as a gang-bang artiste in a French brothel. These fancies had gotten her off a few times. But now, nothing. Every time she imagined one of her favourite scenarios, she found herself thinking about quilting patterns or Battenberg lace.

Perhaps she should try her hand at a really difficult quilt – maybe a Ruth's Basket, a pattern that showed Ruth gathering tears as well as wheat in her foreign kinsman's field. The strongest colours would be red and violet and the border would be green. Why had the Moabites followed her mother-in-law to a strange country? Out of love? Or because the story-teller thought any good wife would leave her second-rate world for her husband's alien fields? Well, Amy thought, it would make no difference to the complex beauty of her quilt. She could picture it in her head, all of a piece as if she had already completed it. A number of designs scrolled in her mind while she mentally calculated how much fabric she would need.

A clink of glass interrupted her thoughts. She turned her head and saw Barry, panting and pouring a brandy from the decanter he kept in his bedside cabinet. He was radiant with post-coital bliss. Amy was covered in sweat.

"God, Amy, when you decide to let rip, there's nothing like it."

She had blacked out again. She wanted to cry but tears would make Barry suspicious. She usually talked after making love, eager to hold on to the feelings of warmth and enclosure; she never cried.

"I mean it. I've never, well, it's better than our first night. Better than any night I've ever had with anyone."

I think my old girlfriends even faked it sometimes but you...you go off like a rocket!"

She had faked it, too, many times. But this time she had faked it on auto-pilot. Her heart beat furiously, from climax, Barry would assume, but she knew it was the pulse of fear. A boyfriend had called her "a real cold bitch" once, and Barry had used the same words about other women. "You mean it?" she asked cautiously.

Barry mumbled more endearments. "I've never had a woman respond like that. No matter what I did, you just went into orbit!"

If only she had been that responsive, she thought. It was the Slice's fault. It kept her from concentrating. To get off, she had to cling to her fantasies – like a man who, in a state of near panic, mentally latches on to football scores to keep from coming too soon.

Barry had never said that the Slice could be reversed but surely something could be done. She buried her head in the pillow, trying to think of a plausible excuse for wanting the Slice reversed, an excuse that had nothing to do with sex. Amy didn't want men screwing around with that part of her being, in case they found out things she didn't want them to know.

After work the next evening, Amy rushed around the kitchen, hastily preparing a buffet for Barry's co-workers. He had called her at the office and told her he'd be bringing a few colleagues around for food and drinks. "Just do something simple," he had said, but still there was a lot of work involved.

She placed a green salad on the buffet table and stood back to check the balance of colour. A pinwheel mosaic of olives and her own pickled white onions sat in a jade green platter, surrounded by bowls of cucumber sauce and heaps of scorched meat. Barry could not complain about the spread she had concocted in just a few hours. He had hung up before she could ask why he was giving a party at such short notice.

"Amy," the House said, "Barry has just notified me that he and his friends are in the lobby. He says to tell you that he is already well-oiled."

Which meant the rest of them were as well. Most likely the men wouldn't notice what they ate. She chewed on a celery stick and gazed venomously at Georgie, Barry's macaw.

"Georgie loves Barreese!" squawked the bird, and the African grey noisily concurred.

The front door swung open, admitting the sounds of hysterical laughter. Barry staggered in first with a body slung over his shoulder. It was a woman's body, dressed in a thin black leotard. Her rump was next to Barry's ear and her blonde, heavy hair jerked around him like a whip. Despite his intoxication, he effortlessly tossed his burden on to a seating pod.

"Techumen's latest failure," said Barry. The men trailing behind him cackled. One of them was carrying a metal hat-rack – or that's what it looked like to Amy.

"Put the stan' over by the fireplace," said Barry. "The light's best over there."

The man did as Barry said while Barry again picked up the doll. He carried her over to the stand and then arranged her arms over the pegs of the hat-rack. Her

chin nearly touched her chest, causing a fall of hair to hide her face. Barry fiddled with something at the back of the doll's neck. Her head lifted and her eyelids slid back to reveal brown eyes with hugely dilated pupils.

"What do you think?" Barry asked of Amy.

"It's a porno doll," she said bitterly, eyeing the doll's freakishly small waist and Himalayan bosom. "So this is Techumen's model for the first android. What imaginations you guys must have."

"Hey, don't be so quick to judge," said Barry. "We can't implement real androids until we produce something profitable for the company." He came over and put an arm around her shoulders, while the guests swarmed over the buffet table. "You're right, Trixi is a sex shop doll, with a snatch and all the rest of it. I don't like it either but it's bound to sell. Then the company will let us move on to better things."

"But why did you have to bring it here?" Amy asked.

"I don't know. After three bourbons at Tulip's it seemed like a good idea."

Amy turned away from the doll. Hospitality demanded that she control her contempt for the doll and its makers. What did she care if Barry was making sex toys? She was going to leave him. After checking the buffet table and re-filling people's drinks, she poured one for herself.

The evening was not as boring as she feared it would be. Some of the guests even talked about things she was interested in. Barry's boss, Norman, asked to see her quilts. She led him upstairs and before she knew it, he was pressing cash into her hand, in payment for a huge peacock-pattern quilt. Norman was very drunk but Amy didn't let that stop her from trying to sell him her two remaining quilts as well. The men had their own dumb fantasy downstairs, why shouldn't she indulge one of her own? Someday she'd have a showroom and a studio and people would pay three times the amount she was charging Norman. It wasn't difficult to persuade him that he was lucky to have such a collection. When Barry later handed her a champagne flute, she was giddy with her own success, glad that she, too, had something to celebrate.

But what were they celebrating? Barry's friends had said the doll was a mistake. Despite the increasing muddle of champagne and cocktails, she could see that the party was clearly a celebration – but what of?

"Barry," she called as she approached him. He was deep in conversation. "The doll's a failure, isn't it?"

"What?" he turned away from the cluster of men who were admiring the Trixi. Amy repeated the question. "She is," he confirmed. "We had to decommission her."

"But you live and learn, don't you?" said a grey-headed, purple-nosed man whom Barry had introduced as Richard. Richard's neck looked like a pouch in which he stored alcohol for the winter.

"Can you explain," she asked Richard, trying hard to enunciate properly, "what a Trixi does?" Amy blushed. It was obvious what the doll was meant to do. "I mean, how do you know when one isn't working?"

"The boys in QA hook her up to a 'scope and give her a trial run," answered Richard, his features playing a tug of war between the leer of a good-time Charlie and the professionalism of a Techumen man.



"What was wrong with the one you brought into my house?"

"Don't give away any trade secrets, Richard," Barry interrupted with a chuckle. "I haven't told Amy about the Trixis. This model was supposed to be a bit more active than the 2000 series. But QA said she just squirmed around like a headless worm. Something wrong in the software."

"But we'll sure get the bugs out now," said Richard, clapping Barry hard on the back and making him splash red wine on the pale wool carpet.

By the time Amy was back from the kitchen with anti-stain, Mike had been ushered to the door.

What does it feel like to have a body in bed that simply reacts to your caresses? Was that what she felt like to Barry? Barry could tell her if only she wasn't afraid to ask him. There were a few times in the past when she hadn't tried to come or to fake it and he'd sulked afterwards, the words "frigid bitch" plain on his mind. Since the Slice, her reactions had become even more dishonest. Someone was driving Barry mad with passion and it wasn't her. She felt that, somehow, it was all her fault.

What had the men been celebrating? She never found out. By the time morning came, bringing with it the mother and father of all hangovers, she had forgotten to wonder.

"Stop calling it the Slice," said the medic. "It really pisses me off." He was pulling a suspended brace down from the ceiling. "I'm sorry," said Amy, looking up at Barry. He had

kindly insisted on meeting her at the medic's station. "A lot of people call it that, though." A couple of nights after the party, Barry had come home with what he said was good and bad news. The bad news was that the Slice caused blackouts during sex. There had been tears, consolation, and a minor quarrel. But the turmoil was swept away when Barry told her the good news: the Slice could be reversed.

"Well, they're wrong," said the medic with a snort. He seemed too young to be out of college — just a snotty kid who enjoyed telling dim broads where to get off.

"The designers who developed the treatment made up the nickname," Barry said to the kid. "If it's good enough for us, I think it's all right if Amy uses it, too."

"Sorry," said Snot-nose, "but it's still inaccurate." "It'll do until the Slice goes on the mass market," Barry replied.

"How does the reversal work?" Amy asked. The medic silently got out of his seat and offered his chair to Barry. "The loader here," Barry said, patting the drill-like object as if it were his own faithful hound, "simply loads programs into your head and sets up indexes to various stimuli — stimuli that you provide."

Amy almost gave in to her doubts about going through with the reversal. In her experience, the programs had made up their own minds about their activation. She felt a little better that the medic was letting Barry work the machines.

"The reversal works," Barry said, "by simply purging the loadspace in your brain."

"Purging!"

"Okay, call it removing. We'll just remove the software, sweetheart." He pulled something that looked like a padded horseshoe across her field of vision and fitted the end-pieces at each temple. "No harm to the customer's hardware is possible."

"Yeah, listen to him," said the medic. "Barry knows more about this than any of us around here."

Amy was glad that Barry was with her. A vague, irritating hum filled the room as the transmission gun sketched a diadem inches from her skull. She felt as if she should have demanded a final cigarette.

"Aaaaaameeeee," crooned the House.

"What?" she said, still groggy from the operation and from the long sleep. She'd gone to bed as soon as she got home.

"Barry has left for work. Don't you think it's time you were out of bed, too?"

"Amy! Amy!" shrieked the macaw. She could hear him all the way from the living room. "Munch Time, Munch Time! Georgie loves Barr-eeee!"

She lifted her head from the bed. "Shut down," she snarled at the House. "Complete System Withdrawal." This was one morning when she didn't want some mechanical device intruding into her life. She knew it was irrational, but she sometimes suspected that the House and the Slice were secretly connected.

She made a special trip into the living room before going into the bath. "And you can fuck off," she said to Georgie. She turned to the doll and said, "And that goes for you too."

Amy went back into the master suite and quickly ran her bath, fully conscious of how to manage the controls, but briskly efficient in getting the job over

with. She felt so good, it seemed a shame to waste her jubilant spirits on a day at work. She did something she'd never dared to do before: she called in sick. Then she went out shopping.

After a few hours buying fabrics and visiting a café, Amy rode the elevator to her apartment, eager to cut the cloth that she had bought. Now she could start the Ruth's Basket quilt she had dreamed about. Amy was surprised to see that the scanner was unlit but then she remembered her fit of pique that morning, when she had told the House to shut itself down. "Serves it right, too," she muttered as she entered the living room.

Something disturbed her about the room. She looked around and noticed that the Trixi was no longer standing in the corner. Amy started to shout at House to call the police, but stopped herself in time. Don't make a noise, she said to herself, her heart pounding, remember you shut the system down. Certain that someone was in the apartment, she began to step as quietly as she could back to the hall door. The doorknob was almost in her hand when Amy realized that she had glimpsed Barry's briefcase. She whirled around and saw the case, lying on the sofa. "Hey Barry, I'm home!", she called out, but there was no answer. Perhaps he was napping.

She tiptoed over to the master suite door, hoping that he wasn't sick, though she could think of no other reason why he'd come home so early.

Familiar sounds were coming through the door — among them, Barry's guttural moans and gasps. Amy stood and listened to his groans, tears welling up in her eyes. Then she recognized other sounds as well. It was a female voice making the sort of noises, saying the exact words, that Amy said while making love. The voice wasn't hers, but the words, the intonation, the rhythm — they were all part of her verbal love-play. The words were silly, childish; but she knew them as well as the pattern for Ruth's basket.

"Oh god I can't stand it!" said Barry's voice.

"I'm coming; I'm gonna take off," came the response — Amy's words, in the mouth of someone else. "I'll never come down." She recognized the fake catch in the throat, the grossly exaggerated passion. She'd given Barry a parody of her own desires, again and again.

Amy quietly walked back into the living room and sat down on a seating pod, careful to face the bedroom door. She glanced at Barry's open briefcase, empty but for a few wrinkled papers and a slim gold pen. He rarely brought work home with him, but today, Amy thought, he had something special in his files, something that he couldn't wait to try out.

Barry came into the living area, wearing a bathrobe. "How long have you been here?" he asked, too startled, Amy noticed, to ask why she was home so early.

"About ten minutes. I don't need to ask why you're here."

Barry walked over to the wet bar and poured himself a respectable slug of bourbon. "It's not like I was making love to a real woman, you know. You can't say I was unfaithful."

"I overheard the two of you, Barry." Amy managed a smile that she hoped looked unquestionably sincere. "And I'm not mad. In fact, I'm flattered."

Barry looked at her suspiciously, then took a hit from his bourbon.



"I mean what woman wouldn't feel a little smug?" she asked amiably. "You believe I'm so good in bed, you thought a doll like me would be a winner." It's not like I was making love to a real woman. No, Amy thought, it never was.

"There is one thing, though," she said, looking down at her fingernails as if she were too scared of losing him to even speak.

"What is it, baby?"

"Did you get me to have the Slice just because it was good for Techumen?"

All the tension dropped from his face. "Nothing like that at all." Barry took a long sip from his bourbon. "It was after you had the treatment that we discovered that you could get a soft-copy of someone's sexual responses."

Amy could tell that he was lying. Now she knew why Barry had suddenly hosted a party for his colleagues. They must have feared that the Slice somehow blocked the sex-urge. When Amy finally made love to Barry, and appeared to enjoy it, the researchers had parted like troops on the first day of leave. "So you told me to have the Slice reversed so you could get a copy of what I do in bed."

"No, that's not the only reason!" he exclaimed. "The Slice had to be reversed so that you could enjoy sex again. We didn't know the Slice caused blackouts." Amy had no trouble believing that much. "We did the read-out yesterday, while you were at the medic's."

"But why me? Couldn't you just advertise for some nympho for your experiment?"

"Hey, you said you were flattered! And hell, you

should be. You're the best, Amy. I didn't want some girl off the street who can't even spell foreplay being in my Trixi." Barry joined her on the pod. "The guys at work don't know it's you. And I don't want them to know. My secretary goes in for the reversal next week and they'll think that she's the model for Trixi's. I've given them the impression that I've had an affair with her. You know I could never be unfaithful to you, don't you?" He reached over to stroke her hair.

She forced herself to take his hand and kiss it; then she kissed him on the mouth, sensuously, taking her time. Could Barry tell one doll from another? No doubt he had tried to get his secretary into bed with him but she had been too smart to accept.

"And it'll be good for you too," he continued. "Techumen stands to make millions out of this. Oh they'll market it through some sleaze outfit, but we'll be in the background, raking in the cash. Why don't you start scouting the city for a gallery, team?" he asked.

"That'd be terrific!" she said.

Barry patted her knee. "We'll see what we can do. Let me just go have a shower, then we can get lunch somewhere. OK? I guess you know," he said, grinning sheepishly, "that I didn't realize you came home for lunch."

He didn't stop to hear her reply. After a minute, she followed him into the bedroom. The drapes were still open, another sign that Barry had wasted no time in getting to his creation. She could hear the shower running. She would have ten, maybe fifteen minutes. It wasn't much time.

The Trixi lay on the bed, on top of rumpled sheets. Amy forced herself to look directly at the doll. She was dressed in a lacy blue negligee that had been pushed up to her waist; the garment belonged to Amy.

"Do I know you?" Amy whispered.

The doll turned its head toward her and blinked its eyes slowly. Black feathery lashes on china-doll skin.

"Ooh, sweetie," she said, and began to cock one hip and then the other as if she were shuffling off a pair of panties. Everything about her was meant for the pleasure of an onlooker, any onlooker, an audience of millions.

Amy grabbed the doll by the throat. The Trixi was surprisingly light for her top-heavy appearance. "Do I know you?" she asked again. Are you me?

"Ooh sweetie," the doll responded in a high, respirating voice that reminded Amy of a hand-held vacuum cleaner. "Do it to me rough." Amy could see thousands, millions of the dolls, parroting her words. Had she, the real, breathing Amy, been as compliant as this doll? Just so men wouldn't think that she was an uptight bitch?

Amy threw the doll back on to the bed and brought a pillow over her face, desperate to stop the demented jabbering. Amy didn't have the vaguest idea where the software was stored but she couldn't think while the doll was talking porno at her. Whether the doll's flesh was synthetic or organic, she couldn't tell. She was only grateful that the Trixi had stopped writhing erotically beneath her.

Amy hurried to the kitchen and got a small sharp knife. When she came back, the sounds of the shower were overlaid with Barry's *da da das* to the tune of

Bolero. She scalped the doll. A cloudy, semen-white substance bled onto the pillow beneath the doll's head, revealing a baroque arrangement of metal filaments and wired cards. Amy turned the doll over and found a dataslot. She clicked out the cube and held the porous die in her hands, not sure why she wanted it in the first place, or what she should do with it now.

Standing in the bedroom doorway, she gazed one last time at the Trixi's china-baby face. Silent, the creature did not resemble Amy at all; instead she was a demonic houri conjured by an imagination that Amy did not understand. You could have lain on a quilt of mine, she thought, and eaten the grain in Ruth's Basket.

She walked calmly to the apartment door and glanced regretfully at the loft. There'd be another studio – if not her own place, then one she could share with other artists. That woman, that Amy, would not need to pretend anything. Amy opened her palm and let the cube fall to the carpet. Barry could keep his fakes.



Sherry Coldsmith has returned to her native Texas, after living in Britain for several years. The above is her first story for us, but earlier pieces have appeared in *Skin of the Soul* (ed. Lisa Tuttle) and *Other Edens III* (ed. Holdstock and Evans), and she has another forthcoming in Lewis Shiner's anthology of anti-war sf (Bantam Books). She is currently working on a novel set in the Philippines in the far future.

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The Big Sellers, 9: Marion Zimmer Bradley

by Wendy Bradley

Of all people, it was the Labour politician Roy Hattersley who started me reading Marion Zimmer Bradley when, in one of his "End-piece" articles, he described his experience of reading *The Mists of Avalon*. He contrasted Zimmer Bradley's book with the traditional male-authored versions of King Arthur's story and argued that the Arthurian mythos depends on the women characters not having "characters"; giving them a viewpoint "spoils" the plot.

Charged with feminist ire, I brandished the article at everyone I met for a week, demanding mass purchase of the novel in protest and beginning to read it myself in a spirit of furious determination to like it whatever it had to say. In fact I was quickly enthralled, devoured it in two days and began demanding that everyone I knew should read it because it was good, not because it was right-on.

I am grateful to Hattersley's chauvinism for introducing me to *The Mists of Avalon* because it remains one of my favourite books, a substantial and significant work which has rightly I think attained the status of a fantasy classic. In her introduction to it Marion Zimmer Bradley thanks her husband "who said, at a crucial moment in my career, that it was time to stop playing it safe by writing potboilers, and provided financial support so that I could do so." It seems to me that Zimmer Bradley's works can be divided into three parts: *The Mists of Avalon* (1982) which is a genuinely major work, standing alone (although possibly *The Firebrand*, 1987, is an attempt to recreate the same effect, using the Trojan War instead of the Arthurian mythos); the *Darkover* novels, which form a definite subset and build to be a substantial work in themselves; and finally there are miscellaneous "other" novels, some of which are indeed potboilers.

I read *The Mists of Avalon* again in preparing this article and have to say that my opinion hasn't changed much; whatever my motive for reading it originally, it remains one of my favourites. Malory, Tennyson and other versions I have come across of the story of King Arthur and the

Knights of the Round Table all suffer from the sheer incomprehensibility of the motivation of the women. Is Guinevere simply a slut, Morgan le Fay a witch/bitch and her son Mordred merely evil? Well, OK, I'll suspend my disbelief and accept that the baddies are simply baddies; but then all you have is an action adventure story, black hats and white hats, even if there is a bit of sex, magic and religion to add spice. *The Mists of Avalon* treats the story as coming from the irresistible force of Christianity meeting the immovable object of pagan worship, and so sets up belief systems that mean everyone is acting out of the best possible intentions, Christian and pagan following their beliefs to the best of their ability so that their clash becomes not the clash of good and evil but the clash of well-intentioned people acting for the best in good and strong faith. It becomes a genuine tragedy.

The mainspring of difference between the two religions lies in their attitudes to sex, but this also has a strong influence on their view of the position of women in society. Marion Zimmer Bradley's Christians believe that sex is evil, sinful, a reflection of the route sin took to enter the world in the first instance, and so they believe in the subjection of weaker-willed and inherently flawed women to their stronger and more ethically sound menfolk. Her pagans believe in unity with and submission to the tides of life, the forces of nature, so that sex becomes not sinful but holy and their women either equal or the leaders in religion and magic – just as they are obviously equal partners in procreation and vessels of the invoked forces of nature through their unique role in child-bearing. A lost golden age is hinted at, when Christian and Druid worshipped together as equals, the Christians giving due respect to other religions and the Druids acknowledging all gods as one god, all goddesses as one goddess. This golden age is described as having been lost due to the arrogance of the new breed of Christian priest who cannot accept as valid any other worship than his own. There is also a demographic problem, since Christian priesthood is open to anyone with the necessary smattering

of Latin whilst the Druidical priestly caste is hereditary and the period in which the novel is set sees the priestly line of Avalon virtually extinct.

Depicted against this background are the two intertwined royal families, the matriarchy of Avalon and the patriarchal High Kings. Zimmer Bradley rarely gives us the inner thoughts of her male characters but concentrates on the women; the central character Morgaine and her family relationships. Morgaine is the daughter of Ingraine, duchess of Cornwall of the royal line of Avalon, but she is also related to the High Kings: step-daughter of King Uther and half-sister to King Arthur. She is also the niece of Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, who is the high priestess of the worship of the Goddess, and in Marion Zimmer Bradley's story she is trained in Avalon herself, as Viviane intends to make her the next Lady of the Lake as well as to create in Arthur a king who will restore the worship of the Goddess to a central role in society.

This makes sense of what is otherwise incomprehensible in the plot: Arthur is not seduced by his sister out of unmotivated lust or ambitious villainy on her part, but instead makes the symbolic pagan "great marriage" with the land in a ceremony of king-making, and the fact that it is his half-sister Morgaine who plays the role of the Goddess for him in the ritual only becomes shocking when he looks at it through Christian blinkers; it is intended by Viviane that the birth of Mordred from this coupling should be used as a means to force Arthur to recall Goddess-worship. What is an occasion of joy to the pagans is an unspeakable shame to the Christians, and the tragedy comes from Morgaine's rejection of the role Viviane has planned for her and her concealment of the pregnancy and of Mordred until it is too late for Arthur to be unchristianized. Morgause, wife of Lot of Orkney, is the third of the sisters and so Morgaine's other aunt (where in some versions Morgaine and Morgause are different names for the same person), the villainess. This simple rearranging of the family relationships between the women does a great deal to clarify the tangled skein of plot.

Similarly, Merlin's role becomes clearer when Zimmer Bradley makes it explicit that Merlin is a role, a title, held by two people in turn, Taliesin and his successor, the unfortunately-named Kevin. The heart of the story is the passing of Goddess worship and the triumph of the Christians, and it makes sense that the powerful old mage who presides over Arthur's conception, concealment, revelation and kingmaking is not the same Merlin as the later equivocal character who finally betrays his own faith by acquiescing in Arthur's and suffers the punishment of being walled up in an oak not at some feeble whim of a nubile temptress but as an exemplary disposal of his body after his execution.

In this light, the quested-for Grail and the swords of power become magical Druidical regalia used to invoke ancient powers and then hijacked by the Christians as miraculous symbols of that religion. Arthur is torn between his duty to the magic-using Goddess-worshippers who made him king and his loyalty to and belief in the faith of the Christians who reared him as he grew up incognito and who have a hold on his conscience through his wife Gwenhwyfar.

The story makes sense this way; it also makes for a classic fantasy novel, where magic is a power of the mind used sparingly and with reverence to pass between the worlds. The fantasy element comes largely from the use of several overlapping worlds within the novel; the world of Britain in the Dark Ages where prosaic matters of life and death and worldly power are fought for, and the realm of Avalon which was removed from the world to protect it from the encroaching Christians in the last great act of Druidical magic: "for this is the great secret, which was known to all educated men in our day: that by what men think, we create the world around us, daily new." There is also a suggestion of an even older world, the land of faery where time passes more slowly and it is hard to think clearly, and this is a useful device to overcome plot lacunae such as where Morgaine can disappear to when she is absent from the main events of the court and has to be given a motive for non-intervention, and also it is a useful way of giving depth and perspective to the reality Zimmer Bradley has invented. Clearly with multiple worlds, two is an impossible number; if there is more than one world there should be several, drifting apart as their time-lines diverge. Arthur's Camelot itself is "going into the mists," separating out from prosaic reality, by the end of the novel and of course this separation is also a symbol of how the facts of a situation become mythologized in the telling of a tale. When Arthur's story becomes a story he ceases to be a person and becomes

a character with whom the tellers of his tale write their own message.

The novel has been objected to on other than sheer misogynistic grounds because of the apparent inconsistencies in the portrayal of the world of the fifth or sixth century AD: there should not be a fire in Igraine's bedroom since chimneys had not yet been invented; people should not lean back in their chairs, as only the Pope had a chair with a back rather than a stool; the soldiers shouldn't carry pikes as the Dark Ages had no pike-men. But this is objecting to the novel for failing to do something it is not trying to do; Zimmer Bradley is writing a fantasy book, not a historical novel, and so the rules, although clear, are different. The questions to be asked are not "did they really eat that, do that, own that?" but "if they ate that, would they feel this?"; "if they did that, would they then do this?"; "if they owned that, what would they think about this?" Zimmer Bradley seems to me to have produced a novel which is internally consistent and which makes dramatic and psychological sense and anything else is quibbling.

This is Zimmer Bradley's strength, then, an exemplary fantasy. The Darkover novels, in contrast, are on the edge between fantasy and science fiction; they are set in a world colonized by but then separated from Earth, they have telepathy but this is genetically engineered into humanity by inbreeding and crossbreeding with a telepathic race, the Chieri, native to Darkover; there is no magic. Most of the stories deal with the rediscovery of the planet by Earth and the politics inherent in Earth's colonial ambitions. Yet they read more like fantasy than sf, given the usual boundaries of the genres; more interested in human relationships and feelings than technology and hardware, taken up with characters and their own personal quests rather than with the quick fix that saves the world.

Darkover is threatened in various ways throughout the novel sequence and yet the saving of the world is never the central concern. The world is "saved" by this woman from this problem in this novel, but it is always clear there are other problems and other people will have to play their part in other novels. The interesting thing about Darkover is that the sequence of novels does not actually form a sequence — they were not written to a plan or to form trilogies or one over-arching story. They do not fit together like a jigsaw but like a mosaic, each piece complete in itself but coming together into a larger, although fuzzy, picture if taken as a whole. However there is a downside to this which comes from the occasional feeling that one is missing the heart of the series; that the novel

you are reading is never the central novel, a nagging feeling that the centre is always somewhere else. You can't begin at the beginning and go on until you come to the end, then stop, because the novels don't work like that. This also causes problems with the language, since you don't learn the vocabulary — *laran*, *barragona*, *breda* — incrementally as you move through the books. Friends to whom I have loaned Darkover books have resorted to phoning me up for a translation in the absence of a glossary.

There are two main concerns in the Darkovan novels, the telepathy theme and what might be termed the "woman question." The trouble with telepathy is that it is a rare genetic trait and over the course of Darkover's history comes to be held only by a small caste of hereditary rulers who are occasionally insular and arrogant and look on the gift as a dangerous burden to be used only within the confines of a tower, a quasi-religious secluded building protected by screening from the intrusive thoughts of non-telepaths. Darkover has a history of using "matrix technology," mental power enhanced by technology but open only to those with the inbred mental gifts, but many of the novels deal with a time when this technology has fallen into disuse because of the small number of telepaths able to use it and willing to undergo the rigorous training and utter seclusion imposed by the towers. The remnants of this matrix technology are dangerous to casual users, and several novels use this as their basis.

The *Spell Sword* (1974) has an earthman, Andrew Carr, making telepathic contact with a Darkovan woman, Callista, who has been kidnapped by an indigenous but hostile race, the catmen, who are preventing her from reaching out telepathically to her friends for rescue. Her twin sister Ellemir, and Ellemir's lover Damon, have to work through Carr to rescue her and recover a matrix-weapon held by the catmen. In *The Forbidden Tower* (1977) Zimmer Bradley returns to the same set of characters and deals with their forbidden love: Callista is a "keeper," a key matrix worker pledged to virginity because the telepathic work she undertakes uses the same "channels" as sexual energy and she can harm herself and others in arousal. The patient courtship of Carr and her attempts to return his affection, Damon and Ellemir's attempts to give them support and practical help by overcoming Carr's Terran prejudice against being in telepathic rapport when the other couple are coupling, take up the bulk of the book.

The plot climaxes along with Carr and Callista rather than at the telepathic battle to establish that the four of them have a right to operate as tele-

paths outside a tower which forms the final chapter. Yet the conclusion, which seems to show a way forward for the wider use of telepathic power and its attendant matrix technology, does not seem to be taken up in other novels and this comes to be an unsatisfying feature if one reads several of the books in sequence; if the world is saved why does it have to be saved again so often? The telepaths have power over their circumstances sitting there for the taking but they always seem to be too stupid, arrogant or insular to reach out and take it. One begins after a while to sympathize with the impatient Terrans who want to get to grips with the society, suck out its secrets and make use of them. However perhaps the problem lies in simple demographics again – the telepaths are always at the mercy of inbreeding and close to dying out altogether in some of the stories.

Yet Marion Zimmer Bradley handles the solution to this particular problem with a deftness unusual in fantasy and sf writers; here is someone who can actually deal with sex in a novel. For example *The World Wreckers* (1971) has an extraordinary chapter in which the lovemaking of an Earthman, David Hamilton, and a Chieri, Keral, during which Keral is metamorphosing from male to female phase, is described tenderly and realistically. At the end of the novel the villain, who has been trying to impoverish the world to force it into the Terran hegemony, is unmasked as an exiled Chieri herself; she joins the telepaths helping to put the planet to rights and a tremendous lovefeast leaves the entire female telepathic population pregnant, solving at a stroke at least the numerical problem.

And you keep a straight face, on the whole. Given the arrested sexuality shown in so many sf and fantasy novels, it is a welcome change to find someone at least trying to describe grown-up people having grown-up emotions about each other.

The "woman question" is partly covered by the books dealing with the Free Amazons, the Guild of Renunciates, women who renounce the dubious "protection" of Darkovan menfolk and band together, supporting each other. *The Shattered Chain* (1976) and *Thendara House* (1983) show them in action and something of their training. The scenes inside the Guildhouse where there are seventies-style consciousness-raising groups aimed at breaking down the women's own self-oppressive reflexes are interesting, if only as historical documents (does anyone still run CR groups?). The Free Amazons assert their right to do whatever work they can find rather than what is considered suitable for ladies, and so it is they who first agree to work with and for the despised Terrans in

anything other than the most menial capacity. They alone are required to be able to protect themselves from harassment, physically if necessary or by the simple example of their conduct in public, and so there are frequently warrior-women turning up in Darkover books. Presumably this is Arrow Books' excuse to issue the novels in the UK in lurid paperback adorned with semi-naked sword-wielding bitch-queens; my own fencing days would suggest that something a little more substantial than a pound of jewellery and some leopardskin leggings might be prudent, but no doubt Peter Andrew Jones knows best.

There is something attractive about this "separate but equal" idea of the Renunciates; since not every woman necessarily wants to assert her equality, the idea of a "secret society" of women who have solved the practical, legal, financial, emotional and other long-term problems of female independence and to which one could belong if one were serious has its attractions. Certainly the men I know who have read *Thendara House* hate it passionately, which is at least suggestive! However Zimmer Bradley has set up a straw target to shoot at; the Darkovan society is so palpably inequitable that any independent-minded woman would have little choice but to enrol in the Amazons since the alternatives, assuming one had the telepathic gene, are perpetual virginity as a tower-keeper or life as a brood-mare passing on the vital genes to the next batch of little mindbenders.

The origin of this is revealed in *Darkover Landfall* (1972) which is her novel about the first colonists on Darkover. They quickly realize they are stranded, that the gene pool will be enough to form a viable colony but that the legal equality which Earthwomen have obtained is a "luxury" no longer applicable; the women must be reduced to brood-mares or the colonists will die out. There is even a handy but well-known propensity for spacer women to have low fertility which means that the order of the day has to be, in the words of the Python song, "every sperm is sacred." The pregnant woman to whom it is gently explained that her baby is more important than her life, let alone her liberty or her pursuit of happiness, is not given even the courtesy of half an hour to think over this charming philosophy but forcibly tranquilized and carted off to hospital to rest instead of wandering about trying to do a man's job. And she wakes up weeping with gratitude! Sometimes I find myself finishing a Darkover book wanting to cheer the independence and strong-mindedness of its central characters, and then again sometimes I find myself curled up in the foetal position wondering how I came to be reading this.

Some of the other books, outside the Darkover series, give an interesting sidelight on Marion Zimmer Bradley's feminism and its development. I am especially fond of the scene at the beginning of *The Ruins of Isis* (1978) where the protagonist Cendri arrives on the matriarchal planet Isis with her husband Dal and discovers men are not allowed to run around loose and is offered kindly assistance by the girl pilot of her landing shuttle:

"It can be marked –" she very faintly emphasized it – "with an earclamp or collar tag, but the most effective method is for a subcutaneous electronic implant in one testicle. This is an excellent training and disciplinary device for a male not accustomed to civilized restraints, as it can be located and controlled at any moment."

Dal is a pain in the neck, and in the course of the novel one heartily wishes Cendri had gone for the third instead of the second option but yet in the end the matriarchy is unbalanced and toples when the gods they worship are revealed to be simple super-alien who have favoured the women due to a dreadful misunderstanding when the colonists first landed and the female pilot's slightly overenthusiastic mental image of male oppression becomes their guide to human relations.

Zimmer Bradley's feminism itself is hardly in question but it is certainly apparent that, in her long career as both a fan and a professional writer, some of her early work is not as informed by this feminism as one would expect of her more recent work. The short story "The Climbing Wave" (1955) is a case in point, a story about colonists returning to Earth to find it greened and beautiful, with only appropriate technology in use – an exemplary ecologically sound story way ahead of popular thinking in this respect, and yet when the colonists land and try to discuss the state of the world with the kindly patriarch of the locale, the female crewmember is pointedly excluded from the conversation with a deferential apology that there is no female member of the household to entertain her while the men talk mantalk... and so she cheerfully goes off to do the washing-up! Those were the days, eh boys? But in the fields the phallic spaceships were quietly sitting unused, gradually returning to moss and rust.

It is hard to reconcile the fantasy writer of *The Mists of Avalon* with the writer of potboilers like, for example, *Warrior Women* (1985) or *Web of Darkness* (1984) but it is important not to underestimate the need to make an honest buck and Marion Zimmer Bradley is not the only writer in the field to have followed Charles Platt's Option 4 ("Fairly Rich, Fairly Quick." *IZ* 36): "The half-and-half option. Write a

book for yourself, taking your time; then write something blatantly commercial to rake in some cash."

Zimmer Bradley is currently editing a series of anthologies of "heroic fantasy" stories under the series title *Sword and Sorceress*. This is now at number five or six, and shows every sign of going on forever. They are books worth reading, as one would expect, but they are very slight and it would be good to think there was enough cash raked in to let Marion Zimmer Bradley go back to writing the book for herself, taking her time. Another *Darkover* novel would be nice; another *Mists of Avalon* stupendous.

(With thanks to Peter & Gwen)

Lisa Goldstein interview

Continued from page 19

kind of fiction I wrote I went out and wrote something outside that genre. For a while I thought I was a science-fiction writer because that was what I liked to read, but I wrote mostly fantasy. Then I began to experiment with magic realism in *Tourists*, so I thought I must write magic realism. But the publisher who bought that book (Simon and Schuster) marketed it as mainstream. All right, I thought, I'm a mainstream writer. The book I'm doing now is as close to pure fantasy as anything I've ever written. I have to say I don't really know what I am.

Who are your influences? What authors do you read?

Lately I've been reading people I would call magic realists, though I'd hate to have to come up with a definition of the term – writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez (of course), Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, Isabel Allende. The interesting thing about these writers is that none of them is part of the white, eastern United States literary establishment – the most exciting work these days is being done on the fringes (or what the literary establishment thinks of as the fringes, anyway), at the very edges. I think of science fiction and fantasy writers as being on that edge – my very favourite book nowadays is *Little, Big*, by John Crowley, and I'd consider that a terrific example of magic realism.

To be honest, though, when I'm not reading writers like these I read trashy mysteries.

Up until ten years ago I hardly read outside the fantasy and science-fiction genre, so my influences are the standard ones. The writer who influenced me most was Ursula Le Guin, partly by

showing what the possibilities inherent in the genre were and partly by example – she was one of the first women in science fiction to receive notice and acclaim.

Are you at all interested in more traditional fantasy writing? Do you think you'll ever write a novel in a traditional fantasy setting?

Sometimes. I've toyed with the idea ever since I started writing. The trouble is I don't think I could do it well – it's hard to invent a world from scratch. This is the same thing that keeps me from reading most fantasy novels – they seem to be constructed out of cardboard.

You seem to be dancing on the edge between fantasy and mainstream. Do you have any plans to write a mainstream novel?

I'm halfway through a mainstream novel, but various considerations forced me to put it aside. Some of those considerations, I'm sorry to say, were economic – the house that published *Tourists* turned down my new novel, and my agent was overly-optimistic about selling it anywhere else in the current market. On the other hand I'm not really sure the novel works. I'll probably hang on to it and think about it for a while, and then either finish it or turn it into a short story.

(Lisa Goldstein)

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Glass Angel

Carolyn Ives Gilman

In January, there are a few minutes each morning when the sun shines directly through me. The light threads a path through the maze of decrepit buildings outside the church and sets my halo afire. My stained-glass robes part before my advancing feet; my upraised sword blazes. The shadow of a billboard outside falls just at my feet, where the hordes of the damned grovel. I drive them toward the Pit, my face stern, just, and terrible. For a few minutes I shine with gold and glory; then the sun passes on and I fade.

The dust has settled thickly on me this last half-century, as I dozed and dreamed in the shadow of the brownstone hotel next door. I would rouse on sunny mornings to brandish my sword, then settle back to watch the arching church rafters gathering bat droppings, the plaster growing pulpy where the roof has had a slow leak for a decade. Below, the worshippers drifted in and out, coffins passed, secret guilts sputtered in a waxy pool of age and indifference.

I always knew the present parish priest did not like me. I caught him sneaking glances at me as he prepared for Mass. He preferred the doe-eyed Virgin, a trinkety soap-sculpture in her shrine. But it was me he had to face day in and day out above the altar. It was me at his back when he turned to face the worshippers. He hated it.

I might have gone on daydreaming for years if he had not had me appraised. The art dealer he had called in set a ladder on the altar and climbed up to inspect me. He rubbed the incense-grime from my robes in a few places, then theorized that I was the work of a great stained-glass artist, one Emmanuel Lucien. But the records of my creation were all lost, and there was no signature. It would, of course, have increased my value.

As they stood talking on the altar, the dealer asked the priest why he should want to sell me. "This window has been the treasure of this church for so many years," he said. "The old guide books never called this St Stephen's. They called it the Church of the Apocalypse Angel."

The priest had a weary, watery-eyed look. "That was when tourists still came to this part of town," he said. "Today, no one comes here to see art. Our budget gets worse every year. Selling this window could keep the shelter open for eighteen months. Would you turn away the homeless to keep a work of art? We can't care for it. I don't want the responsibility."

The last sentence was delivered to me in a tone of self-justification. He wanted my approval. But I saw

through his talk of the homeless. He was afraid of me.

"It's such a fearsome image," he said. "Whoever installed it can't have been thinking clearly. I wonder how many people it has driven away. Have you noticed how the eyes follow you?"

"Yes. A pity it's so poorly lighted. In the sun, it would look almost alive."

Which only confirmed the priest's worst fears about me.

He was wrong about my effect on his parishioners. Their numbers had been dwindling, true; but I was not to blame for that. That afternoon I listened as their prayers drifted up to me. They pretended to address the crucifix below me on the altar; but they knew it was only a lump of senseless wood. I am real.

There was the woman who killed a child in an auto accident three years ago. She had come every Wednesday since then to tell me the story. The witnesses had said it was not her fault, and she was never charged. She lit a candle for him, then prayed me to send her soul to hell.

Then there was the old woman who stumped in on thick legs, wrapped in her woollen overcoat and scarf. She was an angry martyr to a still-older mother at home, whom she could not afford to send to a nursing home, and could not leave alone. She prayed for freedom, for the old woman's death, then for her own soul for wanting such a thing. She lumbered out as if her coat were woven of steel.

Then I saw the young, one-legged veteran in the back pew, staring at me with maddened eyes. He still wore combat green and was carrying a gun. He did not pray; but I knew he too longed to feel my sword slash into his flesh.

I realized I was surrounded by the unjudged, the unblamed, the self-convicted.

A premonition struck me. I had been up here too long, half awake, complacently awaiting my call. In the early days I was impatient for the skies to crack open and summon me to the last great battle. It had been twenty years now since I thought of it. Where had those years gone? What was I doing?

It was impossible, I told myself. I could not have missed it. One does not sleep through Armageddon.

Yet once the thought entered my mind, I could not get rid of it. The blessed might have departed quietly some years ago, and left earth in the possession of the damned. I had been inattentive, perhaps too much so to notice the difference.

I had to know.

I waited until evening, when the priest was long gone and the janitor had mopped the entryway. The lights went out, and I was alone. Quietly I pulled free. The lead in my joints was stiff from disuse, and it was hard for me to climb down onto the altar, but I made it safely. Through the hole where I used to stand, the night air drifted in. I flexed my sword arm till it was strong again, feeling the tingle of reality flowing in my veins. I shook the dust from my robes and strode down the church aisle. The door was locked, but a touch from my sword sent it flying open, and I stepped out into the world.

A slow drizzle was falling, and the street was slick. The streetlights all had halos – sickly orange, not hot and pure like mine. No one was about. In the empty street, black manhole covers breathed steam out flat nostrils. The flashing red neon of a pawn shop lit the scene eerily. I felt a rumble under my feet and gripped my sword, for the steam had put me in mind of my ancient enemy who waited out here; but it was only the subway going by.

Many years had passed over the city since the restless times when I had often walked abroad. The last I had seen this street, it was an upstart, rich and busy; it flaunted its parvenu sins in fringes, beads, and bootleg, as if temptation were the most novel thing in the world. Now, the stately old buildings had a tidemark of grimy tile and aluminium window frames washed up around their ankles. There was no jazz leaking out past furtively darkened windows; the speakeasy doors were barricaded and heaped with trash. I paused to study some symbols spray-painted in black on a door, for they had a sinister, cabalistic look; but the nitrous mark of Satan's works were not there. I would know.

My strides covered the pavement quickly, for I stand almost seven feet tall. At last I spotted three people ahead, huddled under a streetlight exchanging something. One saw me. They turned to stare. I saw the whites of their eyes briefly before they scattered. I wondered what they had seen in the murk, whether they knew it was an avenging angel they fled.

I was uneasy. Where would the blessed dwell in such a place as this? I began to pass dark storefronts barricaded with steel grates. A lit window ahead caught my eye, and I made for it.

The window was fogged on the inside; I peered through, but all I could make out was a line of round, teary machine-eyes. When I stepped inside, there was warmth and the calm noise of running machines. The only person present was a young man in worn denim, sleeping in a plastic chair. I loomed over him. He looked up, mouth slack. "Wow, man," he said. Then his eyes lost focus. He retreated into his collar and went to sleep again. I frowned, angry at being taken for some crazed drug-dream.

A gaunt, middle-aged woman came in with a plastic bag of clothing. She saw me but turned, shoulders raised like battlements, to stuff her garments into a machine. Her movements were quick and furtive. She was conspicuously minding her business, making no trouble. She paid the washing machine from a peeling coin purse. Then she checked each of the dryers, took their contents, and put the clothes back in washing

machines. When they too were going, she folded her bag and drew a plastic chair near one of the round dryer windows so she could sit and stare inside.

I could not tell what she was watching. I stooped to look. The window was lens-shaped, like a huge camera-obscura. There were clothes inside, tumbling on a turning wheel. I saw a sleeve fly out, then fall in a heap, only to be lifted again, and thrown back down.

"What are you watching?" I asked.

"The future," she said.

"Do you see Armageddon?"

She was silent a long time. Just as I thought she was going to answer, the machine's hum lost its pitch and the wheel inside stopped spinning. She opened the door, gathered the clothes, and took them back to wash again.



One washing machine was still empty. The woman scanned the room, and her eyes lighted on the man in the chair. Cautiously she approached, then poked him with a bony finger. Satisfied that he was deep asleep, she unsnapped his green duffle coat and peeled it off his back. Then she unzipped his pants and with a few skilful tugs got them off without dislodging him from the chair. He slumped there in tee-shirt and underwear, oblivious. She took the clothes to the empty washer and put them in.

"Filthy," she muttered to herself. "Covered with sins. Just ground in. Wish I had some bleach."

She was not looking at me; I could not tell who she was talking to. "They used to have bleach in little boxes in a vending machine. Those damned punks kept breaking into it to get their drug money. Now there's no bleach to get the sins out. I have to wash

over and over. I can't keep up with it any more." She dabbed at her sharp nose with her sleeve. "There's just too much of it." At last she looked up at me with red-rimmed eyes. "Can you get them to give me some bleach?"

I shook my head. She went back to her chair by the spinning dryers. I left her staring into the lens where time dissolved before her, whirling.

It was now raining in earnest outside. I walked slowly, unsure what sort of world I had come to. At the street corner the rainwater rushed down a grate already clogged with a debris of food wrappers and broke hypodermics. Ahead, a sign flashed in a window, first yellow (25c MOVIES), then white (DANCERS). In the doorway stood a harlot, bare-thighed in a vinyl skirt and leather jacket, long nails painted black. She regarded me without interest from under blued lids, then raised a cigarette. She pursed her lips around it, cheeks hollow as she sucked in smoke.

Down the street, the pavement glistened in the light spilling from an open-air newsstand; I headed toward it. As I drew close, I heard a sharp hiss, a thud, and a small creature convulsed at my feet. A bulky shadow darted from an alley, snatched up the body of the dying rat, knocked its head on the pavement, and stuffed it in a bag. He bent to scatter more bait on the sidewalk, his slingshot protruding from a back pocket. Then he straightened and saw me. His beard-grey face went slack, and he stumbled back onto his haunches. The streetlight was behind me, and I cast a rainbow shadow across his face. In his cloudy eyes I saw my own splendour reflected.

"Holy," he mumbled. At last, someone who knew me as I was! I felt bright with inspiration.

Footsteps came near, then stopped. "Get the hell out of here!" a voice said. "Quit bugging him."

A man had emerged from the newsstand. He wore an oversized anorak and held a length of pipe.

"Come on, Billy," he said to the vagrant before me.

The man turned to him pleadingly. "Pretty," he said.

"Yes, I know. But not real." He turned to me roughly. "Now clear out."

I brandished my sword. "What sort of heathen are you?"

He looked me up and down. "This poor dimwit never did you any harm, but all you'll do is fill his head with crap. We don't want your type around here."

A mighty wrath burned inside me. "I am an angel of the Lord!" I cried in a voice like the sound of many waters.

"Maybe," he said, "but I could break you with a pebble. You're made of glass."

I looked down in shock. It was true; my white linen surplice, my golden girdle – all glass. I put my hand to my head, and heard a clink of glass on glass. My burning halo was as fragile as the rest of me.

He was laughing. "Better keep the streetlight behind you. Otherwise you don't show up at all."

I felt shamed, mortified. In a shop window across the street I could see my reflection, and he was right – I carried no fire, I had no inner light. I was transparent as the rain.

"How can this have happened?" I cried.

"You're lost, you poor anachronism," he said. "You took a wrong turn somewhere. The people who wanted you or needed you are long gone."

"But who will chain the dragon? If I am turned to glass, who will set the seal upon the serpent?"

"None of my business," he shrugged. He bent to help the vagrant up, then told him brusquely to get away, and turned back to the shop. I stood desolate, feeling unreal as a cheap billboard image. Once inside the newsstand he turned to look at me. "What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Go on searching for the blessed," I said numbly.

He shook his head as if at an incorrigible lunatic, and went behind his counter. He took something a shelf and tossed it toward me. It clacked on the pavement at my feet. I bent and picked it up. It was a plastic lighter.

"In case you get caught between streetlights," He grinned. "Don't say I didn't help."

The flint was wet and it took several tries before the spark caught. It was a tiny yellow flame, but better than nothing.

A dark wind blew me down the street. Ahead, the sky was lit a plague-coloured orange, as if the moon were rising, her face stained with blood. But it could not be the moon, for the rain was falling fast as ever. I was afraid now, feeling that I might meet Satan around the next turn. If he found me this way, he could shiver me into a thousand pieces.

The intersection ahead was deserted, the stoplights changing colour for no one. Beyond it the street turned into a bridge across a glowing chasm. At first I thought it was a river valley, for I could hear the rushing of water. But no, it was too bright. I gripped my sword hard, for I felt Satan's malice, that undying will to destruction, all around. If we were to meet, it would surely be on a bridge. I set my glassy foot upon the concrete sidewalk. First one step, then the next. At last I was in the centre, over the river of headlights, and turned to face him.

But he was not there. Below me, cars plunged down a suicidal chute of concrete. The bridge swallowed them whole. They whined under me with thin whispers of rage and hunger. It was like listening to the mosquito voices of the demons, which eat away the ears that hear them. For a moment I half-heard a maddening music, a counterpoint of pistons, greed, and triumph.

I looked up, longing for the heavens to open and rain down the everlasting river of righteousness upon the earth. Rage filled me, and my sword blazed bright as day. I raised it over my head, then brought it down to split the earth beneath me. I heard a chink, and a piece of glass fell on the sidewalk. My blade was chipped from hitting the guard rail. The streetlight nearby shone through me, and I bled colour on the rainy pavement.

The priest was not pleased to find the morning sky showing through the new hole in his window halfway up the length of my sword. He called the insurance company right away. They searched for the stone that must have broken me, and for the missing chip of glass, but they never found it.

They decided I was too unprotected, and so they caged me in – a fine wire mesh outside, to stop the

rocks, and inside a plexiglass casing. I cannot roam in the city again. But I do not want to.

They have all gone away and left me here – the seraphic legions, the thrones and potentates. Even Satan has gone, if he ever was here. There is no one left to fight, no war for me to win.

Now that there is nothing to wait for, I have learned impatience. I glare down at the priest as he putters about his silly ministrations, and he feels my eyes on his back. I dream about the day that will never come, when bleach will rain from the skies, dissolve all the buildings, and wash the world clean. The sun will

shine through me, filling me again with the power to bless and inspire. Then I will step out into the world, and there will be rainbows all around me.

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Carolyn Ives Gilman lives in Moscow, Indiana. She has had stories published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and the anthology series *Full Spectrum*, *Writers of the Future* and *Universe*. The above is her first contribution to *Interzone*.

Tube Corn

TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

Joseph Campbell was an American writer and academic whose work traced the common themes in myth across different nations and cultures and pointed out the links and common patterns, so that you could begin to feel as if all myths were derived from or reflections of one myth. This ur-myth, the One Myth (the initial capitals are irresistible) would be the story of a Hero – definitely capitalized, definitely male – called to adventure, reluctantly participating, magically assisted, advised by wise counsellors, engaging with good and evil, ultimately appearing to die but rising to success and returning to his origins bearing a gift of wisdom or fruitfulness.

Campbell's work goes a stage further than analysis and synthesis and begins to suggest that the One Myth can be used as a guide to living, that we are all heroes who must "follow your bliss," and his keynote book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was acknowledged by George Lucas to have been an influence in the development of *Star Wars*.

It is, of course, very easy to read either *Star Wars* alone or the film trilogy together as a myth fitting into this One Myth pattern. Unfortunately this is the point at which some enthusiasts have taken Campbell over, arguing as if Campbell synthesized and codified the One Myth in his books and presented it in a form in which we can use it to guide our lives and that the One Myth in fact is *Star Wars*.

This is not, to the English reader, an unfamiliar idea in itself. Those of us who grew up on C.S. Lewis and

were led from the fantasy into the theology are aware of the contention that "pagan" myths are a prefiguring of the Christian myth and the argument that the Christ story was a playing out in reality of the archetypal story faintly shadowed in other religions, i.e. that Christ lived out the One Myth. Alternatively those of us who have read at least bits of *The Golden Bough* will be aware that this argument is a two-edged sword, that Frazer's book can be taken as giving enough evidence to demote Christianity to the status of the worship of Isis/Osiris, Demeter, Dionysus or any other dead god. However the

idea that a science-fiction movie should be examined as if it were a religious experience is, to say the least, intriguing and so I was looking forward to seeing what Campbell actually had to say for himself in the BBC 2 series **Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth** which was shown in the UK on Sunday evenings from July 29 1990.

The series had already been and gone in the States – Campbell died in 1987 and the programmes were recorded over the two years before his death and screened on America's non-commercial and hence underfunded PBS station. Something clearly



Bill Moyers interviews Joseph Campbell (BBC 2)

worked for America – the audiences were (at any rate for PBS) substantial, a video of the programmes walked off the shelves and the book based on the series made *The New York Times* bestseller list for five months. Unfortunately I knew all of this before I began watching; the Campbell phenomenon is not exactly a secret (see for example Kim Newman's TV film, *The Hero Strikes Back*, reviewed in *Interzone* 38) and so it was an uphill struggle for Campbell to live up to his posthumous reputation as a guru.

The programmes themselves consisted of a leisurely illustrated conversation between two men sitting in a very civilized setting, the library of George Lucas' "Skywalker" ranch, although the very first programme had Campbell sitting in front of a coloured glass window and thus invested with an improbable golden aura. Bill Moyers, a journalist and broadcaster, interviewed Campbell intelligently, listening to his replies, letting Campbell talk for as long as he wanted to, not being afraid of silence.

The usual way of filming two people talking is to put the camera on the important one, the interviewee, and record his stuff, and then to turn the camera around and record the "noddies," pictures of the interviewer nodding intelligently at the words of wisdom. These shots are then intercut with the interview itself at moments of less than usual interest. Moyers and Campbell, though, gave us a model interview where they did not play interviewer and interviewee so much as teacher and student and we saw Moyers in the same shot as Campbell, listening and responding, not playing noddies at all. Both Campbell and Moyers seemed to be civilized men in the best sense of the word and the series was, for television, an unusual attempt to give the flavour of someone's ideas without imposing a distorting editorial framework, letting Campbell speak for himself. Whilst not always completely enthralled I was at least always interested in what each man was saying.

However, in programme four we saw Moyers' script over his shoulder and it occurred to me uncharitably that the amount of detail on the page looked more appropriate to a full word-for-word script than a series of prompts and questions for a free-ranging conversation, and I began to wonder just how spontaneous what I was watching had been.

I also began to wonder about some of the illustrations that were inserted into the conversation, replacing the pictures while the voices rolled on. There were paintings, apparently in period, down which we tracked as Campbell described the various elements portrayed, as if he were telling

the story spontaneously and the production team had found a superb illustration. There were curious similarities in style, though, between the illuminated manuscript whose illustrations showed Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the pictures of the native American corn god, and I wanted to know whether I was seeing an authentic piece of evidence in favour of Campbell's thesis or merely an illustration created by the production team to add interest to what might otherwise have been a dry set of talking heads. Were these really authentic American Indians filmed in their days of glory or a piece of stock footage from some forgotten cowboy movie raked up from the archive, or indeed a romantic reconstruction made especially for the programme? Just as I would have flipped through to the list of picture credits if I had been reading a book, I waited for the end credits of each programme to tell me whether I had been watching fact or fiction – and there was nothing. Programme four began with the title sequence captioned "Words of Chief Seattle, 1852" and more black-and-white stills of Indians. The Daguerrotype was invented in, what, the 1830s, so I suppose it was just possible we were seeing authentic

contemporaneous characters, but it seemed somehow unlikely.

The only illustrations on whose authenticity I was prepared to rely were the clips from *Star Wars* and I was prepared to forgive the producers for the lack of credits in return for a showing of my favourite clip, the amazing disappearing waistcoat in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Remember? Han is dragged away from Leia to be lowered into carbon freeze and we hear the "I love you" "I know" sequence? Get out your videos and check out Han's shoulders in the close-ups and medium shots.

I suppose what I am really saying is that I enjoyed Campbell's ideas but they didn't change my life, and that someone who comes trailing clouds of guru glory has to work a little harder not to be disappointing in the flesh, has to show real charisma to keep your mind on his argument and not on Han's shoulders. It's a tough act to pull off and not really a reflection on Campbell that he couldn't do it for me: unless of course you want to argue that trying to read film and television is my own personal hero trail and that I was all along just "following my bliss"!

(Wendy Bradley)

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Learning the Language

Martha A. Hood



Tue June 30-92

What does it mean when you wake up one morning and everyone around you has stopped speaking English, and is speaking something called Plelonck instead?

I came home from college 4 days ago. I was thinking I would stay at Mom and Dad's, until I find a job. The first night, everything was normal. We had BBQ chicken, stuffed potatoes, the usual sort of Mom & Dad & Little Bro Matt kind of evening. I was no more restless than normal under the circumstances; I would have preferred spending the time with my friends from high school (Debbie & a bunch of them were going out that night), but stayed home so as not to hurt anyone's feelings, special dinner & all.

The next morning (on which I had already scheduled a job interview), I wake up, ready to go. I roll over & turn on the radio, for some wake-up music. I recognize the opening chords of "No Dogs for Lester," which is the first cut of the new Cruz St Justice album. Pretty soon, I hear the lead singer, Onan Omnivore, singing the familiar tune. For a moment, at least, I don't notice the words. (Onan tends to bury his voice beneath the guitar track anyway.) But then I realize it sounds different.

At first I think they're singing in Spanish. Why, I wouldn't know. But no, it's nothing like Spanish. Or French, German, Russian, or Japanese, all of which I took at one time or other. So I turn the dial. I get a DJ's voice, and he's speaking like Omnivore was singing — in gibberish. I turn to a third station. The same gibberish. Being good with languages, I've already got the inflection, see? So I turn the dial again. I get the

end of Blue Laquer singing, "Need I Want You." They are less radical than Cruz, and because their vocals are clearer, the gibberish is super-obvious. The song ends. The jock comes on. That's right, more gibberish.

Finally, I grab my robe and run out of my room, screaming for Mom and Dad and Matt to come, and hear.

I guess it was early, because they all sort of dribble out into the hall, grunting and groaning. But then, as I talk and point and so forth, they start frowning. Matt's eyes go wide; Mom grabs my arm and puts her hand on my forehead, and Dad starts talking gibberish, just like the radio. I go, "Come on, speak English; this isn't funny!"

More gibberish, all of them at once. Pretty soon they're running around, Mom's getting me dressed, and they're taking me to the hospital.

The road to the hospital was filled with signs and words that were incomprehensible to me. Okay, I thought, so I'm in an alternate universe or something. That's cool. I mean, I tried to be excited about it, as though I were having a big adventure that I could be the heroine of. It didn't work. It only made me imagine my real family, safe and sound and non-gibberish-speaking, in some elsewhere. I felt terribly lonely and lost.

Inside the hospital, everyone talked — receptionists, nurses, doctors, my family. They talked, talked, talked — to me, about me, over me, around and behind me. With gestures, I made them understand that I couldn't understand. Mom was in tears. Dad looked like someone had landed him a stomach punch. Matt

sat off to one side, seemingly forgotten, silent, rigid and white with terror.

They did scans of my brain, and then they talked some more. Then I waited, while Dad filled out forms. I watched him writing in squiggles. Behind him, and over a door, a green light glowed. Is GAIS the same as EXIT?

Whether it was or not, there was to be no exit for me that day; they took me to a room shortly thereafter. I lay down flat on my bed and closed my eyes. I had this idea: It all started from being asleep, right? So if I could just go to sleep again, when I woke up, every thing would be normal again. I just had to believe it hard enough.

It didn't work. I was awakened by the raspy and incomprehensible voice of a nurse. I pretty much shut everyone out after that.

The next two days brought a parade of doctors, all of whom tried to talk to me, and a string of tests. I endured it all, shutting out their voices and covering my ears every time someone turned on the TV.

After three days, they gave up. They sent me home.

And the minute I got here, would you believe it, Dad was on my case. Of course I didn't understand a word he was saying, but he sure as heck was trying to tell me something.

Finally, I figure out, from how he's pointing at Matt & from Matt's put-upon expression, that the plan is for my little brother the 12-year-old resident genius to teach me what I need to know about Pelonck. Then Dad points to Mom & himself and then shrugs, and I think he's saying that since they both work, Matt's the only one who'll have time to do it.

Well, I'm not too crazy about the idea. As far as I'm concerned, they're the ones who're talking wrong.

So here I am.

I found this empty journal in one of my drawers. I knew it was there; I remember buying it for myself when I was sixteen, when I had the notion of writing a journal. I don't know why I never used it, but now seems the time to start.

I mean, it's been three days, and I'm just dying to communicate in English. I've never felt like this before, even when I went to Europe. I'm glomming onto this journal with the crazy hope that I can make sense of things, by writing them out in plain English.

Yet, when I look at all the empty pages ahead of me, I get the chills. What am I going to be writing about six months from now? In what language?

Wed July 1-92

With great reluctance, I put myself under Matt's tutelage. He took me into the kitchen & sat me down at the breakfast table & starting pulling everything out of the pantry. I admit at first I was rather snotty as he gave me the words for cheese, bread, sandwich, etc. But I repeated everything back, figuring that, if I'm going to have to live here, I might as well know the names of the foods.

Then he drops the bomb and says that his name's not Matt, but Tamir, and mine is not Michelle, but Muira. I get up from the kitchen table and tell him to forget it; I'm not learning new names for everyone, because they already have names.

Get this — he yells back at me. He's never done that before. I don't get too much of what he says, but he's

so upset that I'm compelled to stand there and look at him as I haven't done in a long, long time.

I notice how much he's changed, since I went away to school. He's as tall as I am now, and his voice, when he yells out the window to his friends, would cut through lead. It's still as high-pitched as a girl's, most of the time, but it has the volume-power of a man's. My little brother is almost a man. It's weird to think about & makes me feel old.

In spite of how I felt, the longer we worked, the more I got into it.

By the time Mom came home, I was actually having a good time. The kitchen was all screwed up, too, because by this time, Matt and I had all the packages and cans and stuff out of the refrigerator & pantry. He was teaching me how to read the labels of everything. Mom was a little strange about it. We were being kind of noisy, laughing & stuff at my pronunciation. She was offended that we were having fun with my "problem."

As she bustled around putting back all the stuff we'd taken out, not looking at either of us, I watched her. I've been away for most of the last four years, and yet she looks younger than she did when I left. She's lost weight & goes to the gym. Her hair is softer somehow, and she wears less makeup. I'm thinking she looks a little like Glenn Close, with her hair like that. Of course, I can't tell her that.

After dinner I went out to the garage and pulled out the boxes that contained my tapes & discs that I had brought home from school. I pulled out the box with my discs. Right on top was the Cruz St Justice, with the song I'd heard that morning. Their name was different; it read Ranfon Orio, but it was exactly the same five guys on the cover. I took it inside to the player in the family room. I had this idea. I know all the words of every song on the album; I thought I could follow along on the lyric sheet and maybe learn something. Well, pretty soon, Dad comes in, talking loudly and gesturing. I don't need to know the language to understand; we've been through this before.

I took the Cruz off, and took it to my room. Then I went back out to the garage, and got the box with my portable disc player in it. I took it back to my room and hooked it up. I listened and followed the lyrics until I stopped to write in here. I think I got a few phrases; I'll check them with Matt tomorrow.

I hope someone cancelled my job interview. I won't be able to do much with that until I can speak and understand. I guess I'll have to lower my job expectations too, as French, Spanish et al, have, like English, no usefulness here.

Fri July 3-92

I can't get a straight yes or no out of anyone here.

I ask if we're doing anything for the Fourth. I want to know, can I invite some friends over. They ask who. I go, "John, Doug, Debbie, Brian, and Shawn." They go, "Who?" The trouble here is that I have different names for my friends than they do.

So I described them to Matt & he gave me their Pelonck names. I go back to my parents and ask if I can invite these guys over.

They go, "What for?"

I go, "To talk."

They go, "You can't talk."

And, like that. They won't say yes or no. The thing is, they don't want anybody to see me like this. Finally I just drop it and go back to Matt's room. He called my friends up for me, & asked them to come over. My parents will be too polite to kick them out once they're here.

I'm really looking forward to seeing them.

Sun July 5-92

Doug, Debbie, and Shawn came over yesterday & it was great to see them. Debbie brought this cousin of hers. He just graduated from law school & is starting with a firm here in town, and he is such a babe! His name is Eben. He just moved here a few weeks ago. So I offered, with sign language and my few words of Pletonck, to show him around. I hope I wasn't too obvious. Mom and Dad looked at me all day long like I was a blithering idiot.

P.S. I can't believe it. Eben called just now and asked me out for tomorrow night!

Mon July 6-92

I was in a total state of nerves, by the time Eben picked me up. But it went okay. I had a great time. We went to a Blue Laquer concert & dinner before. I'm amazed he got tickets.

I crammed Pletonck all day long & it paid off. I could understand most of what he said, mostly because he was so sweet & patient about making himself understood.

He didn't even try anything – or not too much anyway. I guess a part of me was afraid that was the only reason he asked me out, since I can't talk.

Thur July 9-92

I've only known Eben for a few days, but it seems like I've known him all my life. He casts these good feelings out, everywhere he goes. When he's around, even my parents act nice to me. He seems to know how to talk to them, which I don't. When he's not around, I get depressed.

I can talk to him, haltingly, about what happened to me. He listens & doesn't think I'm crazy. He says weird stuff has happened to him, too. Not this weird, maybe, but strange all the same. A couple of times, I've almost told him about this diary, but I chickened out, simply because I've got stuff in here about him.

When I'm not with him, I worry. The thing is, the more I learn of this language, the less I seem to understand. Am I ever going to learn it well enough to lead a normal life?

I know it'll never go back to what it was before. I don't know how I know, but I do. Except for my journal, I would think that I had imagined it all. I don't think anymore that I am in an alternate universe. What I think is even weirder.

I think somehow the universe went through a change, and that everyone changed with it, everyone but me. For some reason, I was left behind.

Thur July 16-92

Eben brought Debbie, Doug & Brian over to get on my case – but in a nice way. We all sat out in the back yard with chips & beers & cokes, & they reminded me what a brilliant linguist I am. Even Matt got into it, telling me how incredibly fast I'm learning.

After a while, I realized they're right. I'm learning Pletonck faster even than I learned Spanish. What happens next is up to me & I can't worry about whatever tricks the universe might play on me.

So I am going for it, totally! I talk, I listen, I read, and write, every waking minute.

In many ways, it's pretty simple. Word order is similar to English, there are only a few irregular verbs, and plural is always indicated by an "ee" sound on the end of the word. A big plus – pronunciation is similar to English – the sounds that go into the language are similar. So, with a little work, I will be taken for a native speaker, which is essential to my getting a job.

Wed July 22-92

Some observations:

1) Almost any uncensored thought, if spoken directly, will be considered obscene by someone.

2) It seems the reason most people talk or write is not to communicate, but just to create background noise, a pleasant percussive buzz, as though life is one big feature article in a glossy magazine, or a smiley light news filler on TV.

3) No one here is aware of how phony they are. "Mean what you say, and say what you mean," they say, but no one ever does.

Tue July 28-92

I did my first job interview today, with an insurance company. Mom thought I was crazy. She goes, "Why not wait till more of your speech has returned," but, the way I look at it, the thing to do is to lay myself totally on the line.

It was scary, but not too bad. No one said anything about the way I talked. I have a feeling they're not going to hire me though. *C'est la vie*.

Sat Aug 8-92

The last week and a half has been a total nightmare. It's like I took one step forward, and two steps back. And it could have been three steps back. What I mean to say is that I'm darned lucky to be writing in here right now. The day after I last wrote in here, Mom was cleaning my room & found this journal. She confiscated it, like it was drugs or something. I couldn't believe it.

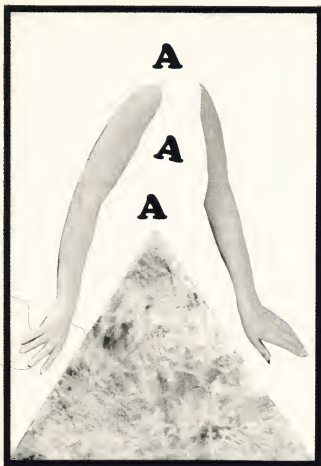
The next thing I know, the next day anyhow, I'm back in the hospital. They go through the bit of taking pictures of my brain again & doing other tests. Then they decide to keep me, for "observation," as they say.

The next day, a psychologist visited me. He asked me about what had happened to me, and I tried to tell him. Then he talked. And talked and talked and talked and talked at me. He really got going. For a minute I could barely take in what he was saying. It was as bad as it was when I first awakened.

When I finally did understand, well, then it was worse. He wanted me to "accept the possibility," as he said, that what had happened, hadn't happened – that there was no such thing as English. He asked me to say something in it.

I go, "I can't believe this is happening to me."

He shook his head. It was gibberish to him. He didn't even ask me to translate. He goes, "Think again about what you are claiming, and whether or not you are really sure it is true."



I go, "OK, let me think about it a minute."

Well, it seemed to me I had one hell of a choice. I could stick to my story—and he would say I was crazy—or, I could agree to the possibility that English never existed. Then it would seem like I had never existed, in a way. I mean, if I give up my perception of reality, what is left?

Something really important happened then. I saw that I didn't have to take either of his choices.

I go, "I'm not sure what is really true & what isn't. All I know is what I see. In a sense, it's not important what the truth is about my past. What's important is now. Whatever the truth about English, I am ready to put it behind me. I need to learn and to get on in my life." While I say this, I am careful to act calm & not act nutsy.

Well, he thinks that's great, grins & nods at me like I just aced the answer to a trick question, but there's still the matter of my journal. He's got it, fat little fingers clutched around the white leather cover, his thumb squashed over the gold lettering. He goes, "So, I guess you don't need this any more."

I didn't say anything.

So he tossed it over his shoulder. It landed kerplunk in a tin trashcan, about five feet from my bed. And then he left.

Okay, fine, I thought, so now what? If I go get it, they'll just take it away from me. If I leave it, I've lost it. I paced around in my room for an hour & then Eben showed up for a visit.

He could see right away that I was upset, and asked me what was the matter. At first, I was scared to tell him. You see, when my parents put me in here, they

called Eben up, to "come along for the ride." Really weird. Later, I saw them, talking to Eben out in the hall, consulting him like he knew something. All of a sudden, I wasn't sure whose side he was on. But I couldn't very well hide it then & so I told him. He looked at it in the trash and then told me not to worry about it, he would take care of it.

Later that night, they took the trash away. I thought, *Okay, I'll have to start another one when I get home.*

My hospital stay dragged on, to no particular conclusion. Then, like last time, after three days, they gave up and sent me home.

Unlike last time, I'm a virtual prisoner here. They won't give me the car; they won't "let" me go out on any job interviews. The only person I'm allowed to go out with is Eben.

And, the first time I did, he had my journal out in his car for me. I don't know how he got it; he wouldn't tell me. I wondered if he'd tried to read it, but I didn't ask. He made me not want to ask. He has the ability to focus a conversation where he wants, and I am happy to go along.

He is so charming. He is a master at avoiding conflict & smoothing things over. But is he just an especially good diplomat, or is he just a hypocrite like everyone else? If my parents can't believe him, can I?

Mon Aug 10-92

Eben has been giving me some advice. He says:

- 1) Don't get caught with the journal.
- 2) Don't be so defensive with Dad.
- 3) Do what they want & pretend to be happy.

He says that if I insist on always saying exactly what's on my mind, I'm going to pay a heavy price. He says that the only way I will ever get my parents to stop hassling me is to let them think they "cured" me, and they won't think that until I seem more "mature" to them.

I go, "How mature do I have to be?"

He smiles and goes, "About forty."

Mon Aug 17-92

I have been biting my tongue for a week, studying Plelonck hard, & things seem to be getting better. I have decided that Eben is right. He may be a little too much of a diplomat at times, but I'm sure I'm sometimes too blunt for my own good.

Last night, I taught Eben some English. I taught him to understand me when I say, "Tell me you love me," and to answer with, "I love you." What fun, to hear English spoken again!

Thur Sept 3-92

Hard work has paid off. Things have been real nice around here lately. Today, they gave me my reward. They took me back to the hospital for yet another evaluation—this time, as an outpatient.

They took more pictures of my head, and, as the joke goes, they didn't find anything. The doctors discussed my strange case among themselves, they discussed it with my parents, and they discussed it with Eben. Finally, they discussed it with me. Here is the final diagnosis, more or less:

The patient (me!) suffered an acute and random neurological event, triggering a temporary aphasia and delusional substitution of an erroneous "shadow

language." They said, "This shadow language is remarkable, for its persistence and apparent complexity." I'm sure!

They told me I'm doing well, and assure me that, unlikely as the first "neurological event" was, it was "anomalous," and so the odds against another one were "virtually astronomical."

I speak well now – or well enough that the doctors clearly think I'm just remembering Plelonck. Yet I am conscious of having learned it. Who knows? By the time I left, they almost had me believing them.

What gets me is my parents, after it was all over. You never saw such big smiles. Suddenly I'm okay again. They took Eben, Matt & me out to dinner at a French Restaurant & spent the whole time patting themselves on the back for "saving" me.

Matt rolled his eyes at me a couple of times, to let me know he wasn't a part of the show.

Life is so ironic sometimes. Absolutely nothing has changed but their perception of things. And because of that, everything has changed.

Tue Sept 8-92

With my clean bill of health, I am once again looking for a job. On Eben's advice, I am continuing to watch my mouth. It would not do for me to suffer a "relapse."

Fri Sept 11-92

I got a job! Just like that! I start next Tuesday. I'll be an underwriting trainee. Sounds interesting, but mostly it means financial independence and FREEDOM!

Sat Sept 12-92

I was looking for an apt. today, & Eben came with me. All of a sudden, he goes, "Let's get married." I go, "Okay!" I can't believe how my luck has changed.

It's like everything has turned to magic & all my problems are solved. I have a job, I have Eben, and I'll soon be out of the house. Oh, and Eben says he wants to learn English. He's turned on by the idea that we could have a secret language together.

Sat Nov 7-92

I can't believe I haven't written in here for a month and a half. Been so busy. I'm beginning to wish we had eloped. Eben & I, so close this summer, & now we never have time to talk.

As far as teaching him English, well, I've given up on that. There's never any time. And he never mentions it. It's as though he never heard of it, as though he never rescued it from the trash for me.

My job is going well. They're going to give me the week after Christmas, unpaid, for my honeymoon. I'm grateful.

Everything now is caterers, invitations & bridesmaids' dresses. You wouldn't believe the junk there is to do. I solved all my problems, I learned the language, but I feel odd, as if something is missing, as if something has been stolen from me.

I tell myself that it's 49 days until the wedding. Just 49 days. I tell myself that if I can get through that, everything will be cool. 50 days from now, I will wake up in a tropical paradise, with my gorgeous babe of a husband & the wedding will be over & we'll have the rest of our lives to communicate with each other



– in English or Plelonck, whichever we like.

I will try to write in here again, before the wedding, to keep track of my feelings and so forth. And if I don't, I'm still going to keep the journal, and take it wherever I go, as a record of this crazy time in my life.

Sun Dec 27-92

When I awakened this morning, the radio in our hotel room was playing another Cruz St Justice tune. It was hot. I mean that Onan's voice was cutting through the guitars and keyboards and the drums aimed, fired, and nailed me. And the lyrics were different from anything I had heard before. They were incomprehensible. I sat up as though someone had set my spine on fire.

Eben was already up, and he was sitting in just his underwear, over on a rattan settee, by the window. He was looking at my journal. He turned to look at me when I sat up, and said something. I didn't understand him.

"Oh no," I said.

"Oh no?" he asked. He pointed to my journal and said something that sounded like a question.

It had happened again.

He put down the journal, frowning. The morning sun filtered through the curtains behind him, back-lighting his hair into a fuzzy blond halo. I thought I had seen him, in every sort of situation, every sort of mood, but Eben looked different to me at that moment than he ever had before. As though he were a stranger and we had not gotten married or even been to bed before.

Still frowning, he came over to the bed. I started to

point at the journal, to get him to bring it over, but I realized no, I didn't want to look at it. I wanted to find out from Eben. I reached out my hand and pulled him down to me.

"Tell me you love me," I said, in English.

"I love you," he said back. They were the only two phrases he had gotten around to learning, and I was terribly glad he had. It meant that English still existed.

A Haut Lix song came on, "Yi Yi Yi Yi." The beginning is really jarring & dissonant. The song is totally out of control. I've never liked Haut Lix that much. Eben reached over and turned it off. Then we could hear nothing but the surf and a squawking pet macaw that didn't seem to know any words in any language.

Sat Jan 2-93

Some observations:

1) I am living in an emotional hothouse. Everything here is expressed in terms of wants and needs. Eben's & mine both.

2) The vocabulary of this new language is too small to properly articulate feelings. As a result, emotional exchanges tend to get muddled and silly arguments result.

3) Every time we open our mouths here, we walk a line (talk a line?) between insincerity and tactlessness. The alternative is to speak of nothing at all.

Tonight, the last night of our honeymoon, we'll watch the moon rise over the water, and we'll dance to tropical rhythms, right at the edge of the sand. We'll drink coconut shells of froth, run, and plastic-sword-pierced pineapple. We'll dip bits of raw seafood into uncharted sauces. The magic can last all night.

What I mean to say is, sometimes it's okay to speak of nothing.

I don't know what's real & I don't know what's true. I don't know how many times I will have to forget all the rules, in order to learn new ones all over again.

I will get on with it. I will work at it. But later. Not tonight. There will be plenty of time to work at it, tomorrow.

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Martha Hood has sold short stories to various small presses, including *Pulphouse* and *The Gate*. Born in 1949, she is married with a young daughter and has lived in Southern California all her life. The above piece marks her first appearance in *Interzone*, and we're pleased to welcome her.

BACK-ISSUE CLEARANCE SALE!

Issues 1, 5 and 7 of *Interzone* have long been out of print. Recently, issue 17 has run out – and some other numbers are also in short supply. However, we still have an abundance of certain other issues, including some surprisingly early ones. Now, in order to make space for newer magazines, we're having a clear-out of excess stocks. Between now and 1st July 1991, the following back issues are available to inland readers at **just £1 each** (postage included):

Number 2, Summer 1982 – stories by J. G. Ballard, Rachel Pollack, Alex Stewart (his debut) and Andrew Weiner, plus Tom Disch's tribute to the late Philip K. Dick.

Number 3, Autumn 1982 – stories by Nicholas Allan, Angela Carter, David Garnett, Garry Kilworth and Josephine Saxton, plus letters from Michael Moorcock and others.

Number 12, Summer 1985 – stories by Michael Bishop, M. John Harrison, Paul J. McAuley, Richard Kadrey (his debut) and Pamela Zoline, plus book reviews by Mary Gentle and a comic strip.

Number 14, Winter 1985/86 – stories by Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Bruce Sterling, Sue Thomason, Ian Watson and David Zindell, plus a Clive Barker interview and Sterling article.

Number 15, Spring 1986 – stories by John Brosnan, William Gibson, Garry Kilworth, Diana Reed and Steven Widdowson, plus a Bruce Sterling interview, Mary Gentle reviews, etc.

Number 25, Sept/Oct 1988 – stories by Christopher Burns, Peter Garratt, Nicola Griffith, David Langford, Paul Preuss and Ian Watson, plus a Terry Pratchett interview, Tom Disch on Whitley Strieber and much more. Our first bimonthly issue.

Number 26, Nov/Dec 1988 – stories by Susan Beetlestone (her debut), Johnny Black, Eric Brown, Terry Pratchett, Bob Shaw, John Sladek and Charles Stross, plus a Leigh Kennedy interview, Christopher Priest article, etc.

Number 27, Jan/Feb 1989 – stories by Yoshio Aramaki, Barrington Bayley, John Brosnan, Ian Lee (his debut for us), Kim Stanley Robinson and Bob Shaw, plus J. G. Ballard on his favourite sf movies, Kathy Acker and Brian Stableford interviews and more.

All other back-issues (except the out-of-print numbers 1, 5, 7 and 17) cost £2.30 each – or £1.95 each if you buy three or more. **But the eight issues annotated above you may have for just £1 each (£1.20 overseas; \$2 USA).** No extra for postage! Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone* and send them to 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU, UK.

Remember: this offer remains open until 1st July 1991.

Also available: a small handful of copies of *Interzone: The 1st Anthology* (Dent "B" format paperback, 1985, £3.95) at only £2 each, postage included. First come, first served.

Tweaking the Web

Mary Gentle interviewed by Colin Greenland

"For me," says Mary Gentle, "imagination always starts with the material object. I look back at experience and what I'm trying to imagine starts to crystallize. Give me a starting point and I will give you the next three steps down the line, and the nine possibilities that lead on from that. Then I have to go and do something practical down there and see if that modifies my opinion of it."

Gentle isn't just talking about how she writes her glorious, wayward, vivid fiction. You get an almost vertiginous sense that this is how she lives her life: improvisation from a given starting point, and later complete revision, over and over, in the interests of change and innovation.

"I've gone out and come in again," she says, thinking of herself as an actor swapping roles; and then, immediately, jumps sideways into chaos theory. "It's not a slow upward progression, it's a steady state and then a total change. I think I'm the same as everybody else: there are an awful lot of me. It's all committee decisions."

She was born in Eastbourne in 1956, and brought up as the adopted daughter of a cinema projectionist and a housewife. Her mother came from a long rural line, "farm workers, tenant farmer, small shopkeepers, that kind of thing. Through one set of my grandparents, I know what the seventeenth century felt like. I was brought up with it, once a week: out in the country, you got your water from the well, there was no mains drainage, no electricity, only a tiny transistor radio for *The Archers*. My family all married late in life, so part of my childhood was in the 1890's, part of it was in the 1930's. Parts of Sussex are still stuck in 1946 anyway."

Experience was supplemented by voracious reading. At the age of six, she says, she had a reading age of thirteen. "I read like books were oxygen. Someone dropped *The Lord of the Rings* on me at the age of nine, because I was fed up because there wasn't any more *Hobbit*. And the *Narnia* books." Her fascination with Jacobean literature she traces back to C.S. Lewis's *Prince Caspian*. "Yes, I know he got it through E.R. Eddison, but it's straight out of John Webster. And I found him

through Fritz Leiber. In the epigraphs of *The Big Time* he's always quoting *The Duchess of Malfi*. I had to go and find out what that was."

Her memories of school conjure up a clear image of a child too bright and restless for her environment. She was a tomboy and a truant. As soon as she could, she was out. "Round about twelve I was writing fairly continuously, and round about fifteen I thought, People do this for a living; so I'll do this until I find out what I'm going to do. I'm still waiting."



Gentle's first novel, *Hawk in Silver*, rewrote her unpleasant schooldays in terms that owed much to Alan Garner. It was published by Gollancz in 1977. Its author was eighteen, and nursing her mother through her final illness. "There were a couple of years of emotional fallout after that when nothing much happened, and I'm not really surprised. There was a book that didn't work. Then I joined the Civil Service as an evaluation officer."

That meant visiting other people's homes, seeing some of the strangeness that masquerades as everyday reality. Gentle has done more than the average author's share of menial jobs: cleaning houses, floors, bottles, toilets; delivering Meals on Wheels, and cooking in an old people's home. She also worked for her father's cinema. I presume the movies must have influenced her, but she isn't so sure. "It was more the sense of being behind the scenes. Being

aware that a work of art is not something that's just there; it's made, people bring it about. And if other people do that, why can't you?"

She wrote some more stories, which nobody would buy, and then began something which led, eventually and backwards, to *Golden Witchbreed*. She'd known the end of the sequel, *Ancient Light*, since she was seventeen, but it was to take her a thousand pages to get there. "It's a Jacobean drama on another planet. Also it's set in an alternative future where the British Empire never collapsed." Typically for Gentle, this idea, which any other sf author would have displayed prominently and proudly, isn't even mentioned in *Golden Witchbreed*. More important, as far as she was concerned, were the themes: "ecology, feminism, and a sense of eternal overhanging doom. That stems from growing up with the nuclear threat; I used to be a card-carrying member of CND."

And the feminism? Where did that stem from? "I don't know," she says. "It's always been there. It's raw experience; then you try to get the conceptual tools to deal with it, and see whether you're only reacting, or whether there are thought-out beliefs. You keep reassessing that as you go along."

With *Golden Witchbreed* finished, and no one rushing to publish it, Gentle had been trying unsuccessfully to sell her work for about two and a half years. "I thought, Obviously I'm not good at this, so I decided to go off and get an education so I didn't end up doing the shitty jobs forever." At the age of twenty-six she returned to full-time education, studying for a BA in English and Politics. Then *Golden Witchbreed* sold. Book clubs bought it, and it hit the bestseller charts. People started to talk about "a second Ursula Le Guin." Mary Gentle had gone out and come in again.

Reborn as a professional author, she didn't abandon her other new identity, as an academic. She got her BA, with first-class honours, and followed it with a first-class MA in 17th-century Studies. Now she's dreaming of a doctorate.

"I started writing off everywhere to see if anyone was doing what I want

to do. No university seems to be covering it, and anyway I'd need four other languages, so I've sort of shelved that for a while." It's a topic that would obviously make a wonderful non-fiction book; and then there's a graphic novel she'd like to write. At the moment, however, there simply isn't the time. Gentle has a contract for two more novels in her series in progress.

It starts with the two novellas in *Scholars and Soldiers*: "Beggars in Satin" and "The Knot Garden." Then comes her latest novel, *Rats and Gargoyles*, in which she really gets to grips with the Jacobean, but also with H.P. Lovecraft, Alexandre Dumas and polymorphous sex. "Black Motley," in Roz Kaveney's *Tales from the Forbidden Planet 2*, is apparently about the music hall. "It's set in the city in Rats, but in the nineteenth-century version of it. After that, the next two novels, *The Architecture of Desire* and *1610*. They're not actually a trilogy; 1610 is less like the other two than they are like each other."

The sequence explores what Gentle calls "the pre-Descartes universe. It's not cold and material, it's warm, animistic, everything's connected; things work by sympathy and congruence; distance and definition are fluid; mind and matter are one. It's the universe of divinity and the Great Chain of Being: totally theocratic, but you can fiddle with it. Characters like White Crow, who's a soldier and a scholar of hermetic magic, know that up and down the Great Chain you can tweak the links. In broad terms, it's the occult universe, adapted, which means bringing in bits of adapted Catholicism and adapted baroque art."

Is this what she believes in?

"I don't actually know what is true, but I know it's a useful way to regard things. Hermetic magic provides a vocabulary that describes what we now describe with chaos physics. Dividing things into the molecular level, our level and the macro level is pure Plato. As above, so below. Correspondences."

"Everything's connected to everything else. Writing is a problem of screening things out. The problem is, where do you draw the line, where do you stop expanding and try to steer things round to some sort of temporary conclusion?"

"In the Renaissance world-view, everything is itself; but it also means something. You have to read the world, the physical world. You read patterns. Everything is a metaphor for itself while being itself."

As I ponder this, suddenly figure and ground reverse, and Gentle's Renaissance milieu starts to sound extremely modern – postmodern, in fact: the landscape of signs. She's not unhappy with the suggestion. "What goes around comes around," she says. Her own favourite metaphor is the web, of

connections and constructed meaning; she's working on another novella of White Crow and Balthazar Casaubon, the gargantuan master mason, in which architecture merges indissolubly into computer architecture, and hypertext is a regeneration of the Renaissance Art of Memory.

Without being in any way abstract or "experimental," *Rats and Gargoyles* is already a gesture towards what Gentle sees as the future hypertextual form of fiction, in which every element of the story will allow instant access to nested files of background data, ramifications, connections and variants. For a start, the book comes with illustrations, rather murky reproduced from alchemical and symbolic prints. "If you follow them up," Gentle promises, "they will a) illuminate, b) surprise, and c) deconstruct. At least they will if they work right."

Now her conversation is starting to sound hypertextual, proliferating its own subheadings and footnotes even while she stirs her coffee. "People who like detective puzzles will enjoy them, and the bibliography in the back of the book, which is there a) to cover me, because the stuff I've borrowed I've messed about with, and I'd quite like people to see the originals, and b) to give people/lots of interesting paths to follow if they're like me."

"I love research," she says. "I don't expect everyone else to." She admits that research her way has more to do with inspiration and synchronicity than academic rigour. "All through *Rats* things were turning up when I needed them: details of wild rat behaviour, or something on the butterfly as psyche, or the Black Sun. I'd put my hand on a bookshelf and the book would be there, or the print I needed to illustrate something. Sometimes it actually feels like you can prod the world and say, Oi, I need this; and the world will give it to you."

Rats and Gargoyles was written in seven months, in a great dark blaze of intensity. Did she have any kind of plan?

"I think it does get planned, down there somewhere, I just don't have access to it. I'll prefigure something, but I won't know what it is until later. There are things in there that are explained, there are things in there that are explicable, and then there are things in there that won't ever be explained and they're not explicable."

"You go into a book knowing something will be said, but it may not be what you intended. Things have their own internal logic. A lot of it is moving around in an internal landscape. If it wasn't discovering as well as making, I wouldn't do it, I'd get bored too easily. This is why I never plan things out until the end, and if I can help it, I don't know the end until I get there."

In a landscape of signs, an origami

world of implicated fictions, there's no shortage of stories for her to annex. "They're everywhere from cave drawings through legends through medieval bestiariums through newspapers through what people say to each other on buses. Things present themselves. K.V. Bailey in Foundation talked about 'the openness of my idealational approach'. I liked that, that's a nice phrase. If I want to sling in the Hernandez brothers' comics, in they will go. If I want to rip off large chunks of speculative freemasonry, that will go in as well."

In her introduction to the Titan Books edition of Gilbert Hernandez's *Humon Diastrophism*, Gentle observed, "Comics always start 'Meanwhile'." Of her debt to Gilbert and his brother Jaime, she says, "Some of the characters in *Rats* could be from a panel in *Love and Rockets* – one of them definitely walks like Hopey – but it's chiefly the way the Hernandez plot and structure things that taught me I didn't have to be linear: I could go here and there, and link things back round again. The congruence of visual images is what carries you forward."

Another crucial narrative technique Gentle attributes to her studies in drama. "You almost never hear what the characters are thinking. You see what they do, you hear what they say. The rest is up to you. It's the condition of drama; it's the condition of real life. I want to say, These are people; judge them on their terms."

Many of her characters have historical originals, or faces taken from portrait galleries. The great gross Casaubon, for example, who seems to be a cross between Falstaff and the bigjolly man who recurs in the work of Michael Moorcock, is actually "a revenge on the two historical Casaubons; and a sideways take at Middlemarch because why the hell not? Also he's partly a together Ben Jonson; and he's partly me."

Footnotes, please, Mary. "Isaac Casaubon in 1614 dated the Hermetic manuscripts, which were supposed to be pre-Platonic magical treatises. He turned round and said, Actually they were written in the second or third century B.C. by these Christians out in Alexandria; and the bottom fell out of the market in Renaissance magic. And Meric Casaubon was the man who after the Restoration did the smear job on Dr John Dee, which is why he went through four hundred years of being regarded as a conjuror and a charlatan."

And Ben Jonson?

"Wonderful Ben Jonson. Having studied Jacobean revenge tragedy in my first degree, for the master's I thought, Right, let's do comedy. Also Ben Jonson's the great guy on London, and London you have to put down as one of my major influences. This all

started about a month after I moved from Sussex to within spitting distance of London.

"I got hugely irritated with Ben Jonson. I don't care if he's been dead four hundred years, that's no excuse. Even before Inigo Jones, he was the great propounder of the neo-classical ethic: harmony, restraint, order, decorum, propriety — and there he is, writing plays that are satirical, grotesque, lavatorial, sexual, perverse. They wouldn't know propriety if it bit them on the bum. He's fairly unsavoury in his personal habits and dress, but he also commands a vast loyalty from the people around him. You look at him, particularly when you're tearing your hair out, and you think, Why doesn't this man know where he's coming from? I think he didn't. I think he kept two selves and they didn't talk to each other, which is why he ended up so unappily."

Multiple selves again. Trying not to wonder which of Mary Gentle's selves thinks it's Baltazar Casaubon, instead I ask about the astonishing vistas of her enormous city, "the heart of the world." Apparently the bits that aren't London or Rome or Hell are from Rouen, which she visited in 1986, partly on holiday, partly scouting useful locations.

"I came away with the idea for a children's book with sort of Three Musketeers rats in it. That one died the death and lay fallow. After I'd written 'Beggars in Satin' and 'The Knot Garden' it suddenly dawned on me: it wasn't a children's book, it was an adult book; and it wasn't a talking animal book, there were people in it too." The king of the city in Rats and Gargoyles is a rat-king, like the one in Alan Moore's *The Ballad of Halo Jones*: a group entity of eight rats with their tails inexplicably knotted together. The rest of the rats are priests, functionaries, and, like the ones in Prince Caspian, scheming courtiers. The humans are commoners, forbidden to carry money or weapons.

Rats is as radical in its politics as it is in its philosophy and its imagination; and in its form too, which the author calls "democratic. No one is the protagonist; no one privileged over the rest. All the characters are justified, by their own lights. Which is not to say some of them aren't being hypocritical with themselves, but that doesn't invalidate the point."

Does she think she has a political obligation to her readers?

"Yes," she says at once. "You can either be unconsciously political or consciously political. Your obligation is to do it consciously, so people at least know what sort of a package you're handing them, and know that you know."

You can do fiction help? Can it do anything?

"Yes," she says, less confidently, "but it's probably not a one-to-one relation. You plant little burrs of things in people's heads and you hope that they stick there and eventually grow into something; but you know it probably won't be the thing you hoped for in the first place. Science fiction is supposed to be fiction that kicks doors open in people's heads — most of it actually kicks them shut... What is at the end of Rats is an anarchist revolution. Nobody thinks it's quite over and everybody thinks they've won. What the readers make of that is up to them."

So she hasn't got a message?

"No. All you can do as a writer is leap up and down and point to things."

"You cannot help but put your own views across; nonetheless you have to try and put across as many other views as you can manage to portray accurately. It's no use setting up straw men. As a person, I will disagree with any number of things. As a writer, it's my business to write them down as much and as widely as I can. This is why the commander in Ancient Light who has reasons for putting the military in — I can never actually disprove her arguments. It drove me batty when I was writing that. I know she's wrong, but I don't know how to prove it."

"It occurred to me one day that I've written very few things without a war or a rebellion or some sort of revolt somewhere in the background. It's a vast area of human experience that we're not actually meant to look at at the moment, a) because we're supposed to despise it, though if you despise it you have stopped yourself understanding it; and b) because it's an ever-present threat that is too large to look at."

Her own willingness to contemplate organized carnage she attributes not simply to the requirements of the genre, but to an abiding fascination with swords. "If you're interested in Jacobean tragedies, you write stuff with swords in. After a while it dawns on you that there's only so far you can take it."

"So I trundle off to the Tower of London to research edged weapons for 1610. There were two guys giving a demonstration of stagecraft sword-fighting, where you make a lot of noise and flash, and you hit each other's weapons, and it's got nothing to do with actual swordfighting; and I knew that wasn't right. I still would have liked to learn it, but they don't teach anybody except drama students."

"Fencing's too stylized, that was no use. Had I not known it, standard historical re-enactment is not what I wanted either, because most of it is a choreographed series of attacks and defences, outside of which you do not move. But at the Tower I ran into possibly the one man in England who

could teach me what I did need to know, except I didn't know I needed to know it then. His group has had nine years to settle down and work out a safe, competitive, freestyle method of swordfighting." The swords are blunt, but everything else is authentic, down to the homemade period costume; even the shoes. "Nothing is choreographed, everything depends on the skill of the individual. I'm actually reasonably good at it; which is a worrying thought, because I just wanted to find out how it felt to hold a sword and use it."

From Battle Group, and from a hit-tech version of live role-playing known as Laser Tag, Gentle has begun to learn "things like basic fieldcraft, basic camouflage. How to be a small inoffensive bush. Your opponent walks past you six feet away in broad daylight, and looks you in the eye, and doesn't see you there. I didn't believe it until I did it. All I'd done was stick a couple of twigs in my helmet and stand there and think, I am a tree."

"When someone says to you, Take this eight-man platoon, go round the back, cover a great deal of country and do a stealth attack in the rear of this other party — if you can do it, you've actually done something real, though it misses the final resolution. I wouldn't join the T.A. I wouldn't join the army. That would be — wrong?" she hazards, as if suddenly unsure. "The more I get into doing the shape of things military, things to do with killing, with war, as opposed to sitting down and talking about them, the more I begin to understand the mind-set of the people who do join armies, and the less I see an answer to the problem."

This is where her "wonderful Ph.D." comes in. "The reasons why the revolution in military techniques in modern times brings about the nation state. I got deeply into the ideology of architecture — this one's the ideology of weaponry and the early arms race. How that actually affects social structure... You'd have to read training manuals from the Netherlands, Germany, France and Spain and so on. Somebody will get there before me, because they'll have the qualifications."

For someone so interested in history and its forces, I point out, she's very free in what she does with them.

"History is what you make it," she says. "Chiefly, history is what other people make it. History is a mirror, and a metaphor, and a non-reusable resource."

I'm getting the hang of this now. I put up my three little flags. History is a mirror.

"Okay, the heart of Rats is the Renaissance, a version of it. Why? Because it's most like where we are

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Forward Echoes

Gwyneth Jones



In our time we are ready for aliens. We have the technology. We have the anticipation: what they call in my country the longing, the *hiraeth*. I am a freelance journalist. My name is Anna Jones Morgan Davis. I begged, argued, lied, pleaded for two days and nights solid, after I found out about the expedition to the site. I left home possessed by one iron determination: to be there when the object was identified.

The transit lounge of the desert airport was a breeze-block garage with glass doors and a sand-scoured wooden floor. Johnny Guglioli and I were pursued there by a skinny and very dark little man in a khaki uniform too heavy for the climate. Whenever he managed to catch Johnny's eye he hissed softly and made a wistful, obscene gesture: rubbing his thumb against two fingers. A broken digital clock hung as if half strangled from an exposed cable above the shuttered coffee bar. A single monitor screen, fixed to one of the concrete roof beams, showed the quivering green word "departures"; and nothing more. Parties of Africans sat about the floor. I hadn't had a chance to change into protective disguise, so the men reacted

instantly to my appearance.

In one of the rows of seats a lone white woman traveller lay sleeping, stretched over her battered flight bag along three black plastic spoon-shapes. A cracked panama had slipped from her sun-browned face.

Johnny and I were in trouble. Johnny was American, but had come back from somewhere to London for the trip. For our separate reasons we'd missed the first leg of the official journey. We had expected to join the expedition here, for a special charter to the capital of the country that lay to the south. Our destination was in there somewhere, beyond the desert and the great river. But we had missed the plane. Perhaps we had missed the plane... The real trouble was that Johnny would not bribe, because bribery and corruption were the root causes of so much of Africa's misery.

The hall was devoid of information sources. The little man, whose hissing and hovering was making Johnny look like a girl alone at a late night bus stop, had already told us what he was going to tell.

"I'll ask one of the women," I said.

But she spoke no French or English or didn't want



to get involved. Faces around her gazed stonily out of the archipelago of dark robes and peeping finery. A woman made an unintelligible comment in a tone of deep contempt: the natives were hostile.

We tried to remain calm.

Johnny stretched and pressed his hands behind his head, raising the fan of eel-brown hair that was overheating his neck. He looked, momentarily, like a hostage getting ready to be shot.

"Embarkation for Planet X: colonist class. Isn't it weird how these places always manage to make you believe there's no air outside. That's futurism for you, comes from the cultural phase our world was in when the standard concept of 'airport' was laid down. I mean, look at those chairs —"

"I suppose they might be more comfortable in a lower gravity."

I had bumped into Johnny by chance at Gatwick. Our paths had crossed several times before, in our small world; and we'd always enjoyed each other's company. Johnny Guglioli was a young

American (USA citizen I mean) of a highly recognizable type: shrewd, naive, well-informed and passionate about the world's ills and the possibility of curing them. His writing had a strangeness that worried people a little, even after it had been toned down by his editors, and his selfless arrogance infuriated many. But I respected Johnny. He could be absurdly didactic. But, loud or brash, his eyes never lost the uneasiness of those children of Utopia, good Americans, who have woken up and found themselves — well, here, where the rest of us live.

For that bruised puzzlement in the face of what people call normality I could forgive him a good deal. I could forgive him — almost — this disaster.

In any more hopeful location I'd have walked out of the airport and found myself a bus. But there was nothing outside the dusty glass doors, in the place where Johnny said we couldn't breathe: only a few dead thornbushes, the red track from the airport building and an endless waste of sand.

Aircon fans roared in a mind-deadening way and without any noticeable effect in the heat. I wondered

how many of the Africans here had been awake that night. I wished I knew how the hell to deal with Johnny, whose button-black eyes had gone blank with stubborn virtue... though it would break his heart to miss this gig. I was tortured by the suspicion that somewhere close there was a VIP lounge where the rest of the expedition were sipping cold drinks.

"Shall we try the PanAm desk again?"

The lone white woman sat up, yawned, and said, "Oh, hallo Anna. So you're in this too? How are the kids?"

She smiled dazzlingly. "I suppose you're another Snark hunter?"

I hadn't recognized her. Awake, her face shed years, its expert makeup lighting up like magic.

"Johnny Guglioli," I said. "Braemar Wilson." And took a mental step backwards. The smile was clearly meant for Johnny alone.

I'd known Brae for a long time, known her before she adopted that nom de guerre. The last time I'd seen her in an airport her heels had been three inches high. Her dewy complexion had never seen the sun, and apart from the essential smart briefcase her luggage was none of her business. But she was equally immaculate in this role. Wherever did she get those shorts? They were perfect.

"Braemar Wilson as in the pop-soc vids?"

"The same. Though I'm almost ashamed to admit it, in such company. I've read your work, Johnny. If I told you how much I admire you, I'd sound like a groupie."

It was the name, she'd once told me, on the gate of the miserable little house she'd been renting after her divorce. Some redundant housewives start up phone-a-birthday-cake businesses. Mrs Wilson had become, in a very few years, a household name in the burgeoning "infotainment" market. Her girlish deprecation irritated me. She had no reason to defer to young Johnny. The ground she covered was hack, but not the treatment.

"Hell no!" cried Johnny. "I want to be the groupie. That 'Death and the Human Family' thing! It was terrific!"

There was a break for mutually appraising laughter – in which Brae warned me, by withholding eye contact, not to presume on our long acquaintance in any way. I wouldn't have dreamed of it.

"Maybe you can tell us what's going on." Johnny affected a casual tone. "Did we really miss our ride, or are these guys just teasing?"

"Oh, it's gone all right. A late change: I feel less paranoid now I know you two didn't get the news either."

She examined us. "What's the problem? You transferred to the scheduled flight, didn't you? Or what are you doing in here?"

Johnny's lightly tan-screened face turned brick colour. "The flight's full. We're fucking grounded."

Braemar looked at our little man, who was still making his obscene gesture. She enveloped the whole situation in a smile so tender and so knowing that Johnny had to ignore it.

"What's my reward, Johnny, if I get you back on stream?"

Having ignored the smile he was able to laugh: to groan with theatrical sincerity. "Name it! My life is yours to command!"

So that's how it's done, I thought.

She never asked us for money, then or later. She simply took our coupons away, and brought them back turned into boarding passes. I have no idea how Johnny imagined that this was achieved, or if he was just plain faking too.

The hotel was a huge tower, a landmark of the French-planned city centre. The taxi-driver had called it "Iceber": it looked as far out of place and as rotten as might be expected at this latitude. We could see from the outside whole swathes of yellow-stained decay, sinister great fissures in the white slabs, broken windows.

There was no phone and no drinking water in my room so I had to come down again. I found the coffee shop and bought a bottle of local beer. There was no one about. Brae and Johnny were maybe sleeping, maybe (I surmised grumpily) improving their acquaintance somewhere. The rest of our gang was on a sightseeing tour and there seemed to be no other guests. Miraculously, I got through to Wales on a cardphone in the lobby. Unfortunately it wasn't my husband or my wife who picked up the handset. It was Jacko, Sybil's child but my darling.

"Is Daddy there, Jacky? Or your Mummy? Go and fetch someone, sweetheart –"

"Mummyanna –" He sighed heavily, and broke the connection. I couldn't get through again.

Outside in the desolate boulevard young women sat selling vegetables. In front of one of them three tiny aubergines lay in the dust, another had a withered pimento and a bunch of weeds. There were no customers. Africa looked like a dead insect, a carcass sucked dry and blown away by the wind. It was too late. No one would ever know what city might have stood here: alien to me, efficient, rich in the storied culture of a bloody and complex past.

People come to my country to see the castles.

In my business I am always dealing with the forward-echo, that phenomenon which is supposedly forbidden in our continuum. But things do affect the world before they happen, I know it. I'm always piecing together footage which is significant because of some event further down the line. I was caught in one of those moments now. Because I couldn't talk to my family it seemed as if the world was about to end. I wished Johnny and I had stayed back in the desert, trying to do right.

There was a banquet that night in the Leonid Brezhnev suite: a bowl of tinned grapefruit segments with a cherry at every place. One of my neighbours was another journalist, a silly Japanese woman. On the other I found a Major Derek Whynton, military observer for NATO: a chiselled-profile, blue-eyed, very British type. I was foolish enough to remark – between the grapefruit and the fried grasscutter – that I'd thought the evidence was conclusively against the kind of activity he'd be interested in. I triggered an interminable lecture, and worse. Some men will take absolutely anything for a sexual invitation – and of course this was Africa, where you can't be too careful. In the middle of the monitoring-industry PR he smiled archly, laid a hand on my knee and asked me if I was married.

"Yes, twice."

He angled himself so he could count my rings, and blenched visibly.

"Two husbands?" He sounded seriously alarmed.

"One husband, two wives."

The major was relieved, but mildly disgusted. "Polygamy, eh? That's a remarkable regression. I don't mean to be offensive, but it seems odd that any modern young woman can accept that arrangement."

"If that was the arrangement, I wouldn't accept it."

There was a big darn at my place. I studied it, intensely bored. A clean white tablecloth is a lovely thing. But when a thing gets to be more trouble than it is worth you throw it out. Or put it in a museum. There is no human artefact so sacred it deserves to stay in circulation forever.

At least I'd got rid of the hand. Major Derek marked me down as emergency rations, only slightly less dodgy than the local whores. He discovered he had to hurry away somewhere, between the ice cream and the speeches.

Spiky electric candelabra hung low over the crowd, like spiders in ambush. Some bulbs were brilliant, some dark; making a broken pattern that was repeated as if continuously by the glass doors of the roof terrace. It looked as if something out there was eating up the stars in random mouthfuls.

Johnny was at the bar, with Brae. She wore a pricey little khaki number, Islamically modest. Johnny probably thought it was her old school uniform.

She was regaling him with bad-taste stories about the African notables. Johnny didn't mind this too much. They were only politicians.

"What about that guy Obofun Ade – in the white with the kind of hippie embroidery?"

Nigerian pharmaceuticals billionaire, vocal backer of the West Africa Federation Initiative. The African contingent at this gathering was alarming; almost as if something really important had happened.

"A lot of what Ade says makes sense..."

"True enough. But you know where the money comes from?"

"Cheap neuro-drugs, undercutting the fat-cat multinationals –"

"They say his family's plant is based on kidnapped streetkids."

"Aaah –"

"Rows of them. Kept alive in vats..."

"Aaah, Brae..."

I was listening before they saw me, they were being loud.

"I don't want to hear any more of your dirty jokes. You'll get us thrown out –"

"Jokes?" said Brae. Her eyes slid contemptuously around the colourful gathering, her fingers tightened around her glass. I could see the indigo shade in her unpainted nails: a sign that Johnny was unlikely to read. "Who's joking? They were always like it. 'As we neared the city we passed several human sacrifices, live women slaves gagged and pegged on their backs to the ground, the abdominal wall being cut in the form of a cross and the uninjured gut hanging out. These poor women were allowed to die like this in the sun... Sacrificed human beings were lying in the path and bush – even in the King's compound the sight and stench of them was awful. Dead and mutilated

bodies seemed to be everywhere – by God! may I never see such sights again!...' Benin, 1897. I memorize a lot of stuff. It's handy to have it on tap when I'm recording. That's from *The Diary of a Surgeon with the Benin Punitive Expedition*. The Benin were losing a war of worlds at the time and I suppose they still are: in which situation these people seem to think that anything goes."

I suppose I looked unhappy. Brae smiled at me serenely, with a warning in her eyes. Johnny decided to ignore this last weird assault on his liberal conscience.

"Hi Anna. Having fun?"

I was annoyed over his defection, especially since I had the impression, even more clearly than at the desert airport, that Brae was wishing that I would vanish. So I just shrugged.

Braemar took out a cigarette and lit it. Johnny was astonished. I don't suppose he'd ever seen a lady smoking before. She smelled of something as unsophisticated as a chocolate bar, most unlike the taste of the Brae I knew. The sweetness and the tomboy plain frock made a stunning combination. Braemar was pushing middle-age, and too clever to lie about it overtly. But she'd done an expert job on confusing the issue tonight. Poor Johnny! In her way, Brae was as much an armaments expert as Major Whynton.

She turned, drawing stably on the cigarette, to survey the room. "Isn't this place wonderful? I feel like Bette Davis on a liner. Or like Marlene Dietrich in a saloon. I think this must be the restaurant at the end of the universe."

Something was chewing up the stars outside. Johnny laughed.

"Ah, c'mon, Brae. Life will go on. Let's face it, the overwhelming majority of human beings couldn't give a shit even suppose – which I doubt – that we find the real thing lurking up in them there swamps... Hell, some of them work here. We might as well be dentists as far as he's concerned."

The barman grinned.

"But we need the aliens, Johnny. And we need them to be out of reach. The futuristic encounter with otherness has been our afterlife for as long as our culture can remember. What else can it be – the other world of spiritually etiolated lifestyles, reduced surfaces: cleanliness, order, protein pills for food? Where did the first crude practitioners of the science-fiction genre conceive these images of white-garbed citizens thronging the shining corridors? There is only one other world, Johnny, one theatre of eternal mysteries and unreachable solutions. We go there when we die. What we're doing here is enacting one of those stories where some champion unwisely takes on Death as an opponent. The meeting we're hoping for belongs on the other side of things – if that event invades the world of experience, then what can happen next?"

Johnny smiled indulgently: but it was time to show some muscle. In conversations of this kind he expected to be the one spinning out wild skeins of logorrhoea.

"Crap," he said. "You know as well as I do there's nothing going on here. It's just a good lig: plane tickets, free drinks and some kind of copy. I'm planning to write it up for the *National Enquirer*."

Braemar grinned slyly.

"I have heard," she remarked, "that Ufology is the nearest thing the USA has developed to an ethnic religion. You know, like Hinduism or Islam. The poor kill animals and wear posies. The intellectuals pretend that's all crap. But you still catch them making puja sometimes."

The brown river was huge; it looked vast as a continent. A river like that impresses on you sharply the scale of Africa. There were market stalls along the waterfront, customs booths, warehouses and a long open shed through which I could see the boat pier. Two black limos and a jeep were pulled up beside our shiny bus. A man in a sober white-man's suit – it was the Minister for Culture; I had spoken to him briefly at the banquet – was talking heatedly to a group of river policemen. His aides hung back, hands dangling by their sides. The inevitable bodyguard (there was a war somewhere about: there always is, in Africa) stood at attention, rifle butts along their trouser seams.

Our state-visitors' cruiser had dematerialized. There was only the regular riverboat. It was standing at the pier now, stuffed with people. I hadn't let them put anything of mine in the baggage compartment (I've played this game before). I shouldered my bags and quietly got down. I bought myself a cold Coke, the bottle decanted over a fistful of ice into a small plastic bag with a straw. Soon Johnny and Brae drifted up.

"You reckon that ice is okay?"

"No," I said, my belly instantly beginning to gripe.

So he bought a drink and stood grimly sucking: as if he was showing some kind of solidarity by courting diarrhoea. Braemar declined.

"I think we've entered the Zone," she said.

Johnny brightened a little. "Yeah, the situation's hopeless. Pods all around us. Don't you think that guy in the suit has a kind of pod-ish look too?"

We sat on a decaying wooden bench by the entrance to the pier. The bus slowly emptied: our gang prowled uneasily. What happened next was perhaps inevitable. An English journalist lost his head and tried to shove his way through to the boat. The soldiers hurried over...

Johnny jumped up on the bench, waving his plastic of ice and cola. "The aliens are among us!" he yelled. "They've taken over these peoples' minds! Are you gonna let them get you too? Come on, you guys! Where's your journalistic integrity? This is the greatest story ever told!"

I don't believe he realized that people might get killed. I did, and it didn't slow me down. The pack surged. A mindless media-person greed possessed me. I burrowed, kicked, shoved, elbowed...until a shot was fired, and everything went quiet.

Someone got hold of my arm. It was one of the soldiers. My bowels turned to water. I saw them going after another figure: couldn't see who. Everyone else was being rifle-prodded back through the shed.

"Vous devez payer, madame—"...in the back of the neck, the death of all my nightmares... "Pay for your fare!" repeated the soldier, thrusting me further up the gangway. "First class aircon!"

The Minister for Culture didn't speak to the arbitrarily chosen few. Presumably the gesture alone satisfied,

proving that his government had done its best and the debacle was our fault. Dazed with gratitude, I turned to see who had shared my luck. First come, first served: Johnny was through, and Brae. So was Major Derek Whynton.

On the fabled state cruiser there would have been a satellite dish and a powerful radio link. On the riverboat there was a primitive radio room, available only for emergencies. We were lost in space. But we were still in the game.

At sunset the four of us stood in a line at the first-class rail. A vast swathe of brown water had opened between us and the shore. The red ball of the sun was sliding down behind a row of smokestacks on the bare horizon.

"We call this the post-holocaust," said Brae, "not because of something that won't happen: it might still, just a different ideology's finger on the button. But because of what's happened already. That famous clichéd scenario is all here. The poisoned land, mutated weather systems, birth defects and famines. The cities weirdly transformed into festering sores. Global nuclear conflict, it's obvious now, was a schizophrenic's coded warning of the disaster we were in the process of inflicting on ourselves."

Johnny gave her a long look, which said he understood that this small talk was customized for his benefit. Silence lengthened, the chant of insects receding as we entered deep water.

"These Thirdworlders are all crazy," said Johnny after a while, perhaps by way of apology for his stunt at the pier. "Their minds are fixed on prestige and not being seen to fuck up. Sometimes you have to cut through it."

"I expect the others are pods by now," sighed Brae. "Poor things. I wonder will any of us survive to the end."

Major Derek was gazing ashore with a soldierlike air designed to convey that he was thinking about something very important. I almost sympathized: I felt a little de trop myself.

On Braemar's bare forearm, which rested on the rail, I noticed what appeared to be a tattoo, though that seemed unlikely. It was new to me, whatever it was. It said CAVEAT EMPTOR.

Johnny looked down, and grinned. "Braemar, is that a real tattoo? Or did you just write that with blue ballpoint in the toilet at L'Iceberg?"

She looked up at him – she's not a particularly small woman, but Braemar always manages to look up. "Well, Johnny. You know what they say..."

Johnny leaned down and thoughtfully applied the test to Braemar's tanned and downy flesh. Suck it and see...

In her cabin, Braemar stowed away certain supplies with finicky care, and disposed of a few items on display. Expensive and immoral Swiss cosmetics; a handful of delicate underwear tossed over a box of compact books by her bunk. All that can be said, can be said clearly, she murmured, studying the effect. What cannot be said must be passed over in silence.

She started to eat fried plantain from a newspaper package: removing the square of banana leaf in the bottom, she read a report of demonstrations in Wash-

ington DC. The police are joining the blacks in protest against corruption and...

"How touching —"

Her fingertips gently brushed the blurred faces.

She licked her fingers and stripped off her shirt and shorts. If you look down with your back straight and you can't see your navel, you are in bikini trim. Braemar put her heels together and looked down. Fine. But the mirror, lit by a brutal fluorescent tube, pulled out her bones and gave her the face of a famine victim, a toothless, flat-dugged grandmother in a ragged sari. She gazed at the naked death'shead for a sad moment — everything vanishes. She made corrections.

Braemar had to have a victim. I suppose she'd have made Derek over into a pacifist for the duration, if he'd been the one. Maybe she'd have preferred the clean-cut soldier, but he was impervious. Bit of an old boiler, one saw him thinking. And been around... You couldn't distract Major Derek from the main point by any intellectual fancy-work. So Johnny learned to laugh at her dirty jokes, and appreciate her olde-worlde coquetties; while the poor gazed at us across pipeclayed hawser, and the river oozed by. After a day or two she shucked off the tomboy and took to tiny plastique sunsuits that made her look like Doris Day on Mars. I thought that was a big mistake, but Brae knew better. She had Johnny jumping. Once he caught her in low company, tête-à-tête with an African down by the lifeboats. The black man fled. I heard racist assumption, and that awful note of ownership in my poor friend's voice.

"Hey! How come you suddenly speak their lingo?"

Brae gave me one of her swift and deadly glances: and swooped like a mother hen on the loose cuff of his shirt.

"Is that a fashion point, Johnny? You might catch that on something and hurt yourself."

He melted like icecream. "Aaah —, sorry mama."

"Well, well. Leave it around somewhere in the saloon, and we'll see what the button fairy can do."

The button fairy! Oh, Johnny.

He cornered me on the twilit deck after dinner, demanding information. I told him nothing, of course. He was very suspicious. He hated her makeup. What was the point in painting herself like that, here in the middle of nowhere?

I was in no mood for his intimate confessions.

"Johnny," I said. "You know exactly what the point is."

He grinned, he blushed. He'd never had anyone daub herself in the blood of tortured animals for his sake before.

He loved it.

There were no longer tin-roofed markets at the piers, or smokestacks along the horizon. Tall trees began to emerge, back where the swamp became solid ground. The mosquitoes, not much of a threat while the river was wide, became as horrible as the stagnant heat.

At every halt Johnny and I would disembark, I to record my forward echoes and Johnny to smell the air. What did you see in the sky that night? What have you heard? It felt like the progress of the Magi. My

French barely penetrated the local patois: maybe that was why we never got anything but blank stares. We returned with parcels of fruit and strange sticky food, sheepish under the catcalls of the boat's whores, who leaned out from the second class saloon and shouted for us to film them and make them famous.

Braemar didn't interfere with these trips. But by staying on board, taking no pictures, doing no work of her own, she managed to devalue them.

I wasn't feeling well. The boat food was horrible. Travel and stress had messed up my menstrual cycle, leaving me with a heaviness that lay on my mind like unfocused guilt or grief. Johnny and Braemar baited Major Derek and played their "death of science fiction" game. Telepathy quizzes, impenetrable allusions. How would we four survive under the tentacled master-race? Derek they had down as a collaborator, I was to join the resistance... I just became more depressed. She couldn't even leave our fantasy quest alone. Any wild-eyed hope of friendly aliens seemed ludicrous, in competition with the brutal realism of what she was doing to Johnny.

Our cabin showers had ceased to function. I was queuing at the only working ladies' washroom, down in the teeming hold. The women were friendly enough, but as I reached the door a crewman appeared and grabbed me.

"Madame, douche, douche privée: le cap'tan wants..."

The cabin was tiny, and hot as an oven. A huge woman sat in the curtained bunk, robed in green and indigo, with an intricate indigo headcloth. Her full lips looked not painted but naturally, deeply red. She



gestured towards the shower. The bunk curtains twitched: did she have someone hidden there? I stepped into the stall, dropped my sarong and began to wash, the relief of cool water on my skin so intense I didn't care who was watching. When the water stopped, somebody pulled open the door.

"Haoi, Haoi —" shouted the little man, as I grabbed my wrap.

He wore an immaculate white shirt and trousers, his plum-dark face was bloomed and fissured with age. The woman held something bright that moved: a toy of some kind. The captain was brandishing a bag of shrimp crackers.

Oh, Hanoi. "You were in Vietnam?"

"Oue, Oue. Hanoi. Saigon. Long time ago."

I wanted to rush away and get my gear. A retired foreign legionnaire: this was wonderful —

The captain beamed, satisfied that he had established credentials. "English — moi, non." He gesticulated further. I gathered that the woman was his interpreter. I was about to launch into French, but she spoke first.

"You must not ask," said the indigo woman sleepily. "All this asking questions, that makes problems."

She lifted the thing in her hands. As the captain pushed me out of the door, soaking wet with an armful of wet belongings, I glimpsed again the fluid, metallic movement.

I reached my cabin just in time to throw up. It crossed my mind that David's vasectomy had failed and I was pregnant. It must be a boy this time, the little alien inside fighting with my inimical chemistry.

The boat anchored at dawn out in mid-channel, just below a muddy confluence. The halt was for our benefit: it was time for us to leave the great river. Several hours later a small boat came chugging out of the emptiness. Johnny and Brae were in the saloon, studying the garbled "Breifing" we'd all been handed back at the capital. I was on deck with the major.

Derek jumped up and was at the rail as a vision of military splendour arose: polished cap-brim well down over the eyes.

"Good morning, my name is Simon Krua. I'm looking for the International Expedition to Lake Gerard?"

My heart sank. The major grew visibly larger as he stuck out his hand.

"Derek Wynton, Lieutenant Krua. Major, actually. Well, you've found us. Let me introduce — ah — Mrs Anna Jones: a British lady journalist." The major gave his barking laugh. "There are two of them, I'm afraid. Two ladies, and a young American chap. The media, you know. Don't worry, I'll keep them out of your hair."

The river boat was silent as we left it. Not a single whore stuck her head out to scream goodbye. We crossed a borderline trimmed with sticks and small branches, from gruel-colour to muddy umber, and swept around into the narrower stream. A tiny, ancient steamer was waiting for us, a kind of coelacanth of the swamps. I don't know what would have happened if the whole party had got this far. It was hard to see how even we four were going to be stowed.

Johnny cackled. "I think I'm on the wrong trip. Did

I book for the dinosaur hunt? I didn't mean to do that. No wait, is this the fabled Hollywood retro-world? Don't tell me. Bogart and Hepburn androids are about to come swanning out of the mangroves."

Nobody laughed, particularly not Simon Krua.

The Major had a lot of heavy black boxes. While they were being stowed by Krua's soldiers, he turned on us — in the cramped and cluttered afterdeck that was to be our territory. His blue eyes gleamed in triumph.

"Now listen."

We had no choice, there was nowhere to go.

"There has been a serious infringement of the London Accord, and I surely don't need to tell you what that means. I'm sorry, but whatever wild ideas you may have had that's the whole story. My mission is to investigate, and to keep my findings quiet pending a full international inquiry. You've been allowed to come along so far because circumstances dictated it: but I'm going to have to confiscate all recordings, and take charge of your equipment."

There was a deafening silence.

"From now on, the ladies will not go on shore at all. This is dangerous country, guerrilla forces are active. Johnny, may I ask you to use some common sense...? Please pack up and itemize your professional effects. Receipts will be issued, naturally."

He disappeared into the deckhouse, shutting the door.

Johnny whistled, on a slow note of sour amazement. "The Empire Strikes Back. Now we'll be sorry for the way we teased the miserable jerk."

Braemar stared bleakly at a pile of divers' airbottles, stacked in the stern. For once she was completely silenced.

I was shaking with rage. I found a roll of tape and began to seal my forward echoes. There is never any way out when you run up against the bastard military. They have no respect. What seems to us utterly inviolable, like consecrated communion bread in old Christendom, they'll take and swing and smash its brains out against a wall...

It must have been Major Whynton who told the captain of the river boat to give me that warning. Maybe it was the powers behind him who had cancelled the cruiser. I would have shared these thoughts with Johnny and Brae, but it would only have made Johnny quite unmanageably provocative. And I still meant to be there, at the end of this trail.

"What's your real name, Brae?"
"Alice in Wonderland. Kali. Jael. James Bond, 007, licensed to kill. I'm in deep cover."

You won't tell me, will you? It's childish."

"I haven't a real name, Johnny. I've never been identified."

The moon had risen, the night was immaculately black and white. The African Queen (the boat didn't seem to have any other name) was tied up so close to the bank that they'd been able to clamber into the mud-stalking branches and sneak on shore. A tree had fallen: they were sitting on its trunk above the water. They passed a joint of the grass that Braemar had bought on the big boat. When it was done Brae took out her cigarettes and lit one.

Johnny removed it from her fingers and snuffed it out. "Destroy yourself on your own time. I don't want to catch your cancer."

Broemor laughed. She loved to be bullied.

In her cabin on the boat he had moved a small heap of underwear to find out what books she was reading. Like bruised leaves the scraps of silk released a tender perfume: vanilla and roses, the scent of her flesh. He was assaulted by a mad impulse to steal something, to wear it. Something strange was happening to his libido, to be traced no doubt to the combination of poor nourishment, little sleep and excellent East African blow. He was in a state of quiet sexual frenzy: thoughts of fucking Broe with Anno and the whole first class looking on, of all three of them setting on Major Derek and forcing gross pleasures on him.

But to be doing it with this corrupt middle-aged woman was a perverse orgy in itself. Who was the real Broemor? How did one get to meet her? That was a conundrum. The invocation, by means of all the masks, of an essential mystery forever out of reach, was only another routine in the ancient cabaret.

Which he at once loved and hated: a sickeningly pleasant combination. Is this normality? he wondered. My God, is this how it feels to be a regular guy?

"Actually, I couldn't care less. You're Broe to me, and no other label would get me closer to the inside of that box that doesn't occupy any normal space. All I want is somewhere where I can fuck you without being at the same time ravaged by foot-long poisonous centipedes, or overheard by Major Derek."

"We could try the dinghy."

"The guy who drove us over from the big boat sleeps in there. And the cookboy sleeps in the row boat."

Irritably, Johnny threw the snuffed cigarette into the water.

"Shit —"

He scrambled out to retrieve it.

"Johnny, you're crazy. What are you? A New Age Hasidim? Don't you know it is impossible for anyone to keep the whole of the low?"

He shoved the wet cigarette into his shirt pocket. She was right, the new Torah was as ridiculous as any other set of rules. As if one less cigarette and in the wilderness would save a poisoned planet.

"Do you feel weird, Broe? Do you have a strange feeling like a kind of psychic travel sickness: brainstem nausea, and is it getting stronger by the day?"

"I don't feel anything that isn't perfectly normal."

"I just wondered."

"Johnny."

She took his hand, still cool and wet from the river, and laid it along her groin.

"That's otherness. That's where you meet the alien. If you could always have a breast to suck on and accommodate cunt to hold you, you'd never miss the rest of the world, with or without flying saucers. You are everything that matters, Johnny. And I'm the place where you belong."

He looked at her, the cool moonlight mysteriously altering his young face, cutting time's shadows in its rounded outline: and withdrew his hand.

"Talking dirty again," he said. "I think I'll throw you in the river."

"You really want them, don't you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm curious. There are

UFOs every day. There's never before been an official snark-hunt like this one. I just want to know —"

Countless insects chanted. Something much larger suddenly howled out a long dying roll of sound. Johnny was instantly distracted. "Hey! a wild animal! I didn't know there were any of those left."

He dropped to the path and hurried along it, heedless of centipedes. Broe followed, until he suddenly stopped dead. There were points of gold in the blackness ahead: a cloud of sentient fireflies, the outline of a mind.

"What is that?" he breathed, owed.

"It's a village, Johnny."

"Huh." She scowled, annoyed at himself. "Those pods are fucking sneaky. It's probably only pretending to be a village."

But the lights in the darkness held him. "When you see that," he murmured. "Row, as the cove-people say it — you know why the stars in the sky had to be people, why stories were made up about them. What else could those steady little fires in the night possibly mean?"

Broemor touched his arm, turned him to face her.

"Johnny, supposing I told you the truth? Supposing I told you: I'm a member of a secret international organization, on a vital undercover mission. And I need your help."

"My God," said Johnny, at last. "You're not joking, are you?"

She shook her head.

He felt a new rush of gloriously mingled lust and disorientation. It was another game, more fun. It might even be the truth: why not? Broemor could be anyone.

"You're after the Major? Yeah, I worked it out for myself. He wants some dirt: Reds in the swamp. And I reckon our friend Kruo's already made sure he won't be disappointed. The bastards, they'd take us to hell with them if they got the chance. What are we going to do about it?"

Her smile was mocking. "Oh, no Johnny. The truth is better than that."

The lake was kidney-shaped, about a kilo across and five long, the long axis aligned roughly north-south under a natural plateau in the surrounding hills. The landing site was supposed to be somewhere around here. The local warzone was up beyond, cutting off air and road access. The water was completely opaque. It stank. The soldiers had investigated its depths and found nothing: I didn't envy them the experience.

There was a well-established camp on shore, out of bounds to us. Derek and Krua vanished into the jungle every day with a line of laden, sweating squadries. We were left behind, supposedly under guard. But the soldiers were friendly and venal. There was the dinghy with its outboard, and the old rowing boat, Other Ranks, For The Use Of. Taxi rates were soon established.

I tramped up the winding path with Sackey, the civilian cook, agreeably silent beside me.

I was thinking about Braemar, the way she was when I was teaching a welfare course in media technology, to help pay my way through college. She was years older than me, but so young: so abject, with



her constant childcare hassles and her meanly obstructive husband. I became her confidante. She told me about her childhood in East Africa: Asian mother, white daddy. Things had gone sour when the family came back to England, the usual bloody mess of domestic violence. Brae had escaped – but then, casebook style, married a carbon copy of the father. Those two beauties had left her with a bitter shame about her “mixed blood,” which came out in twisted ways. How embarrassing it would be if Johnny guessed her secret – after he’d learned to grin at her dirty jokes. Of course I wasn’t going to give her away. I’m on Brae’s side, I really am. I just hate what the world has made of her.

We climbed through open woodland to the plateau. The day was hot but not sweltering, the country very beautiful. From above Lake Gerard was peacock green, like a piece of glass stamped down by a hard heel into the plushy treetops. The African Queen was a dozing waterbeetle. I was worried. Braemar had always used her feminine wiles with ruthless skill (and thought I was a fool to have dumped my “natural” armaments). But now she’d become doubly artificial: ultrafemininity as a conscious construct. The way she made him laugh at her racist jokes. The way she seemed to watch with satisfaction while my good American experimented with the vicious old games. It scared me, the cold way she set herself up to be at once despised and enjoyed.

“It’s down here, Mrs Anna –”

I clambered after Sackey into the dry bed of a stream. It had dried out very quickly. Crusts of stiffened algae clung to the smooth rocks. The banks were

coated, in a narrow swathe on either side, with scum and debris. I saw something shining and picked up what seemed to be half a crumpled can. The metal was a brilliant translucent blue. I rubbed the bright bloom; it didn’t come off. I put it down. Sackey came up and looked: he delved into the pockets of his tattered cut-offs.

“Look, I found these. You want to buy?” He laughed. “No, only joking. We are selling, both of us. Did you pay your airfare?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Good, excellent. All sheer profit for you.”

I didn’t get a good look at the things Sackey held out. He stowed them away quickly.

Then we came to it. The bed of the boiled-off stream ran into an open depression, wide as a motorway junction and roughly oval. It was bare red-and-yellow clay, with sides about two metres high. There was no sign of burning, nothing charred or withered. Above the rim all round flattened trees and bushes were masked in a veil of dried mud.

“Monsieur Sackey, why would nobody down-river talk to us about what happened?”

He shrugged. “Jealousy,” he suggested.

“Where are the aliens now?”

“Hiding.” He looked sly. “Sightings may be rare.”

I walked into the centre. Sackey stayed where he was. I suppose he thought he’d see enough of the place when the tourists started pouring in. I felt a prickling of adrenaline in my uneasy belly. Supposing, after all, something awesome was about to happen to me: a conversion experience? This was the brink. No sane person had ever crossed it.

I saw a small figure hunkered down and poking at the ground. It was Johnny. He smiled as I came up, a wide stretching mouth made meaningless by the black lenses above. He removed his sunglasses and looked at me quizzically.

“Hi. It’s Johnny. Johnny Guglioli, remember?”

“I’m sorry, Johnny. I was –”

“Impressed. Mmm.” He rubbed yellow earth between his fingers. “What d’you reckon, Anna? Roadworks?”

I remembered Major Derek’s version.

“Have you a geiger counter on you?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

Suddenly I felt very sick. I squatted, my head in my hands.

“Anna, what’s wrong?”

“I think I’m pregnant.”

“Oh, shit. The snip didn’t take, you mean?” He looked embarrassed. “Um, sorry. Unwarrantable assumption, and none of my business. What are you going to do?”

I knew what I’d promised. One each is what we’d agreed. There are simply too many people. Why should the Bangladeshis give up their children if we wouldn’t?

“I suppose I’ll have to face up to my marriage vows.”

The nausea passed. I heaved a sigh. “We don’t believe in this thing, do we Johnny?”

“Not me. You know, it probably is roadworks. If we carry on over the hill we’ll find a big corral of jap civil-engineering plant. We’ve stumbled upon an illicit hardwood logging operation. We’ll probably all get shot and dumped in the swamp.”

"And what people saw in the sky?"
"Aurora." He put the glasses back on, and smiled without his eyes again. "We have no neighbours, Anna. No one here but us chickens. Maybe we'll set off one day in a relative way and come back to visit ourselves. That's the only hope."

His manner was very odd; I couldn't make it out.
"Let's get back. It makes sense to get home before the Major. Those tantrums aren't good for the poor guy."

At dead of night, Johnny sneaked into the deck-house. He found the box that Braemar had marked without difficulty, his pencil of light picking out the smudge of Murosaki Rose on a white MOD Supplies docket. She'd had one of the soldiers identify it – by making him want to frighten her, she said. Dangerous little kitten! He suckered a tiny professor that he called his "skeleton key" beside the lock. In a few seconds it had the combination.

Such are the legitimate tools of investigative journalism: for the people have a right to know. Tough luck on the Major if he didn't understand the rules.

All was quiet. Giggling silently, Johnny opened Major Derek's smart briefcase with his skeleton, raised the silver of a screen and loaded a disc that was helpfully labelled (when will they ever learn?) with the dates of the snork hunt. He glanced at some of the files: the mops and notes, and shook his head over them a little. Then did things to the disc that were not good for its long-term memory. He checked the rest of the contents of the case. But Braemar had assured him there was no hard copy, not yet. No paper written notes. And she seemed to know her business.

How wonderful to be Johnny Gughlioli, rightful heir of the greatest civilization the world has ever known. How wonderful to enjoy all the old adventures, with all the new virtues intact.

Out on deck again he stood by the rail and stared, at his own hands which were actually shaking. But only his body was afraid and excited. Johnny's mind rode above, perfectly cool.

He gazed into Africa, in no hurry to get out of sight (I tremors't sleep): plotting the rest of the coup, while tremors of some emotion that his mind did not care to name ran through and through his limbs.

We were in the kitchen at home. David was trying to get Directory Inquiries to give him the number of some chicken expert. (Oh, those tiresome birds and their diseases). The woman on the phone explained that she couldn't because of the attack. "What 'attack'?" asked David. WHAM. The kitchen windows went white with a blinding, blinding, silent flash.

Then it was afterwards. There was a big room in which people were huddled in little family groups. People kept doing stupid things: wanting to open the door, to uncover the windows. I was running around trying to stop them, I was making Jacko hide under some cardboard. I was amazed at myself. I'd always been sure that only an idiot would try to survive the end of the world.

All the while, dreaming, I knew that "Nuclear War" was only a label, only the mask of some different catastrophe.

I opened my eyes. Braemar knelt beside me, but she'd turned into a glistening creature with gills and goggle eyes. I sat up and pushed aside my net. We all slept on deck; it was only luck that Johnny or the Major hadn't woken too. The glistening stuff was wet-wear: the bulbous head a mask and some kind of soft bag-like air supply.

"Brae? What are you doing?"

The bag pumped. She pulled off her mask.

"The Creature From The Black Lagoon. I'm sorry, Anna. Don't be scared. I turn out to be a kind of goodie in the real reel."

She looked, as they say, as if she'd seen a ghost.

"Do you believe in the law, Anna?"

She sounded drunk. Maybe that was the explanation. She'd stolen some fancy diving gear from Derek's boxes, swum ashore and located a disco somewhere.

"I suppose I do. Not anything more than you could put in two sentences: but the law, yes, I do."

"Thou shalt not kill, and so forth? So do I." She shuddered. "But there's the *ograpta nomimo*. That's what Antigone said to Creon in the play: Sophocles. She could disobey the king's edicts because the unwritten law, *agrapta nomima*, was greater."

"Braemar! You haven't been chucking Major Derek's stuff into the lake?"

She shook her head. She looked awfully strange. I almost demanded, what have you done with the real Braemar? But I'd have felt such a fool.

"I was horrified when I saw you at the airport. You knew me well, Anna: and you'll wonder, and you'll suspect. But I think I can trust you. In the end, I think you'll understand."

I lay there trying to read these omens until another dream engulfed me. Black water parted under the swampy trees. Figures rose to their feet. Standing waist-high they seemed human as shadows, or spirits: smooth, ungendered bodies. They looked out at the empty lake and mugged relief and excitement. One of them lifted cupped hands with reverence and solemn delight. As the drops fell a voice whispered in my mind.

Water of life –

They all made the same gesture, bowed their faces and drank as if taking a sacrament. Shipwrecked but undismayed, they stood triumphant in Eldorado.

We have come home.

Next morning Johnny had vanished. Apparently he'd swum for it, because both boats were where they should be. Of course I remembered my dream, but I said nothing. Derek was absolutely livid. He sent out a search party. He stamped around glowering like an outraged father. I will be master in my own house! It says something for the effectiveness of the military regime that while the row was going on Brae and I didn't speak. We didn't risk exchanging so much as a glance.

About an hour before noon something came roaring out of the trees on the lake shore. It was a motorbike. Johnny jumped off the back, and hailed us cheerfully.

"Aho, African Queen! Anyone want a cold beer?"

He'd been to town. Walked out to the trail and hitched a ride to the local cosmopolis. He had brought back a sack of bottled beer and a lump of ice wrapped up in sodden straw. He was inordinately pleased with himself.

Major Derek recalled the search party and, controlling himself violently, announced that he could no longer be responsible for us. He had radioed for assistance. We'd be leaving as soon as our transport arrived.

The heat settled. Major Derek sulked in the deck-house. Johnny wavered along the African Queen's rail clutching a beer bottle, in shorts and a singlet: right foot in a wetwear ankleboot, left foot bare. This improved his balance, he claimed.

"A trick I learned on the rat-ridden wharves of New Byzantium."

My dreams had dissipated. It was only Johnny and Brae, up to their eyes in some stupid scheme of revenge. And I was sick as a dog. I didn't want to vomit, only to die. I crawled under my net and let the voices fade.

Johnny shook me gently awake. I felt as if I'd been asleep for days, but was aware that only an hour or two had passed.

I sat up. "Where - ?"

The African Queen was eerily silent. Johnny's backpack and camera bag were standing on the deck beside him, all strapped up. My kit was there too.

"What's happened?"

"Major Whynton and Lieutenant Krua have been called away."

"Where's Brae?"

"She'll join us."

Sackey rowed us to the shore. We took a different path from the one that went up to the plateau, and soon stood on a red dirt road. A couple of other people joined us, and then a jeep with an open back full of passengers came rattling along.

Johnny paid our fares. A teenage girl's personal stereo buzzed by my ear. A very weary young boy swayed opposite me, hugging an assault rifle as if it was a teddy bear. After an hour or so little bungalows in swept, bare yards began to line the road.

"What about the war?" I asked, bemused.

Johnny shrugged. "Oh, wars. People learn to live with them."

We sat outside a café in the market place of the small town. Johnny explained everything. Simon Krua and Major Derek had been planting evidence of illicit weapons testing. Johnny and Brae had found out, and had been secretly undoing the evil work. This morning was the climax. When Johnny sneaked into town he had suborned the staff of the local radio station - not hard, the man hadn't been paid for months - and consequently Major Derek had learned of an exciting development in the local war. He and the soldiers had rushed off to join in. By the time they discovered there was no excitement, their plans here would be in ruins and the three of us would have got clean away.

The story was a little garbled: and I felt like a child left out of secrets. But mostly it went right past me. I just wanted to be at home, safe with Syb and David and the kids.

"Where's Brae?" I asked again.

"She's tying up a few loose ends."

The market place was surrounded by crude breeze-block buildings with red iron roofs. A few women, one or two men, listlessly guarded the pitiful goods: children's nylon underwear, little blackened corpses

of smoked monkey; piles of ancient French magazines. Johnny had ordered beer for us. It came warm, with tumblers full of dirty ice.

"Pity there's no story."

"No chance," he agreed. "In war-mongering, even to expose a fake amounts to an ugly rumour." He frowned, staring towards the road we'd come in by. "I hope she's okay back there... Well, she ought to be. She's an African, after all."

I started. "You knew that?"

Johnny shrugged. "Yeah, well. I read up some bios when I got the passenger list, before we left London."

He sounded a little ashamed of himself, as well he might. I got the feeling that this small confession signalled some kind of breakdown between them, and I was glad. I wanted to welcome him back into our haven of shared assumptions. But I felt too ill, and his mood seemed bleaker by the moment.

"Johnny, don't fall in love with her. It'll be bad for both of you. She hates men, you know."

"I know," he said. "I know she does."

Above the cinema a hand-painted poster featured a giant, snarling white woman in a bikini. Our get-away car, a big old Mercedes, was hunkered by the storm drain below. Children in grimy old western clothes were playing (what riches!) with a bright plastic toy. I felt very low. I couldn't think of anything to say to Johnny. I was glad when he got up and went to talk to our driver.

So there were no aliens. I drank beer, and let myself acknowledge the disappointment, for the first time. How sad. To have hiked out into the desert, to the burning bush, knees knocking, ready to meet God: and found there was nothing but the sun on an old plastic bag. Of course that was why Johnny seemed so odd, and Braemar too. The embarrassment of having almost been believers... It was going to take us three days to drive to Maiduguri and the airport, right through this war that "people had learned to live with." (My blood ran cold - to think of my Johnny expressing such a hard and commonplace opinion). I would pull myself together. I would record the trip. That and the river journey should make a saleable item.

The toy that the children were playing with caught my eye. I tried to look away: but found that I could not. I called to the children in French: "May I see that thing?"

A little boy came over, put it on the table. It was like a kind of - millipede? It was the same blue as the metal I had found. I couldn't for the life of me tell whether it was alive, or a machine. I reached out to touch. The boy giggled, and grabbed it. In a moment the group of children had scampered out of sight.

A cold prickling of excitement burst out like sweat... With a sudden dire premonition, I grabbed my camera bag.

I use the simplest stock and hardware. I want to be able to edit my own work, cheaply. I don't have the might of a big company behind me. The cassettes looked all right. But when I took the seals off, they fell apart. It was gone, every scrap of my forward echoes.

Johnny came back. He stood looking at the wreckage with his blacked-out eyes.

I stared up at him, having the most ridiculous nightmares.

"Johnny, what's going on? Where's Braemar?"

"She's blowing up a kind of plane," he said, with

the air of someone abandoning all pretence.

He took off his glasses. He was Johnny Guglioli still. It was everything else that had changed.

I said, "They're here, aren't they? The UFO was real."

Johnny nodded warily.

"What is Braemar doing?"

"What I told you. She's blowing up an abandoned aircraft. Okay, a spacecraft. I'm sorry, Anna. But you must see, we couldn't tell you. They have to stay in hiding for now. Or the Major Dereks of this world will fuck up everything."

His smug grin affronted me. I felt for a moment that I was still reacting like a sulky child. But I had my forward echoes: their occult message, no good at the end of this quest. The certainty that there was nothing benign hiding behind Braemar's charade. The sickness in my belly. I could not tell him why, but he was wrong: he was wrong.

"I'm going back to the lake!"

I didn't wait to see what he would do. I ran for the car, and he came pelting after.

Braemar was on the deck of the African Queen. She studied her face in a small mirror. The tomboy nudity that Johnny so approved, she had captured it exactly today: good. She stowed the mirror in her flight bag. Her hands were sweating. Braemar had none of Johnny's confidence. Such power as she possessed over the world's gadgetry was stolen goods, liable to betray her at any moment like the giant's purse in the story.

She thought of the horror of what she was doing. She thought of the innocent virgin whom she had seduced, and ruined. She straightened her shoulders and half unconsciously began to sing as she waited for the seconds to tick away: lost voice of a small girl in scratchy uniform. She had loved that brown serge from far away very dearly, though it was so hot and ugly.

"Land of our birth our faith our pride
for who's dear sake our fathers died —"

The naive sentiment of words and music comforted her.

We came over the rail. Braemar turned around. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Sackey, who had rowed us out, mugging abject apology. Her people were everywhere—confederation of the dispossessed, the colonized.

How strange that I had seen her as acting the role of her self. What I had seen was Braemar undercover, recreating her old effects for a new purpose. Did she really need an accomplice? She could probably have managed alone: but Braemar couldn't change that far. It couldn't be the Major either. His response might be the same in the end. But Braemar wasn't going to wait for his kind to find specious justification for their reflexes.

"Where are they?" I cried frantically. "Are they alive?"

"I think so," said Braemar, without so much as blinking. "I was still getting readings of warm things moving around inside the lifepod when I placed the charges."

Johnny's stunned silence made her furious.

"Don't you judge me, Johnny!" she shouted. "Or judge me if you like, I don't care. I know I'm right. This

is self defence. Oh, I know they won't mean any harm, not at first at any rate. But you, you and I and our whole world and history, we will still be worse than dead: meaningless."

"They could be ordinary," said Johnny. In the voice of a child at Christmas, dreaming of walking snowmen, talking animals. "They could be our friends."

"If they're so ordinary, how come they're here? You need to lie to yourself, Johnny. I don't. That's the only difference between us. I can call them human, call them innocent: and still do what has to be done."

I began to move in, carefully. The talking was a good sign.

"Where's the detonator, Brae? Please, come on, tell —"

I risked a glance at Johnny, signalling him (I hoped) to grab her while I lunged for that bag. His face was blood-drained.

"Braemar, you can't be serious," he whispered.

"You know I never meant this —"

She began to sob.

I lunged. Johnny grabbed me...

Across the water the shore rose into a low red cliff, crowned with trees. As I fell headlong, I saw the bottle-glass surface under this cliff burst open. Water leapt into the air. Trees shook, ran like liquid: tons of earth and greenery began to topple. Everything was shaking. I lay on the deck with my hands clasped over my head.

The soldiers were waiting for us. Strange meeting — it's difficult to recall the details of that aftermath. None of us said a word about aliens. We were escorted to the trail, put into an army jeep. Our personal baggage, which had been left in the Mercedes, came back to us minus the recording equipment. Eventually Major Derek appeared, got in beside the driver and we drove away.

Later, we had a debriefing. The military had found nothing: no aliens, no crashed nuclear fighter. The "landslide" had been a natural occurrence. There was no story at all.

Braemar recanted the lifepod. She returned to the military hoax story. She was a secret agent for peace: the rest, she said, had been a "smokescreen." Hereyes, while she explained this, were supremely cynical, the eyes of a clever coquette who knows no one will ever untangle all her lies. She walked out of the hotel in Maiduguri and disappeared into the African crowd. I suppose I will meet her again in a year or two — pale-skinned, immaculately feminine. She will expect me to have forgotten everything; I will know this without asking.

After she'd gone, Johnny told me the other version. The secret network of the faithful, who knew that the aliens had already arrived and went around protecting them from the authorities. He had played along — "suspending disbelief," he said. It had seemed like another of her games. And now neither of us knew what to believe. Was there actually a secret organization, devoted to stamping out alien intelligence wherever it appeared? It was just too far-fetched, we agreed. Already, like the military, we had resigned ourselves. Already we began to suppress and deny our own memories (so that now, as I write, I do not know what really happened). My tapes are gone. They would have shown nothing anyway; nothing but a

certain atmosphere...

But as we travelled home together I could barely bring myself to speak to Johnny Guglioli. I still remembered that he had grabbed for me, not Braemar... Maybe the aliens were never real, but that moment of choice was. He would never admit it but she'd recruited him all right. Without even trying, she'd shown him exactly what happens to the colonized. Her cheating ways, her sly subservience: habitual, automatic self-contempt. When he was actually faced with it, Johnny didn't want to be a nigger. He didn't want to be a woman for the rest of his life.

I sat staring out of the plane window. At least I didn't feel pregnant any more. But Johnny and Braemar haunted me: that doomed encounter between self and otherness. I saw my face in the glass, looking solemnly in from the empty air. And I wished

that I could darken every window in the world, so that every clear, hard barrier would become a mirror, and everyone who looked through would see nothing out there but their own faces, looking back.

Gwyneth Jones lives with her husband and child in Brighton, and her last story to appear in *Interzone* was "Gravegoods" (issue 31). Some of the situations and characters in the above story will re-appear in a different light in her new novel *The White Queen*, due to be published by Gollancz in 1991. Her three earlier sf novels, *Divine Endurance*, *Escape Plans* and *Kairos*, were all published by Unwin Hyman. She has also written numerous children's books, some under the pseudonym "Ann Halam."

Mary Gentle interview

Continued from page 51

now, in terms of its science, its magic, its political unrest, its understanding of the universe; also it's most different from where we are now, for the same reasons. And it's the reason why we are now what we are. The three hundred and fifty years between is just the working out of what became obvious then."

The dark glass of history reflects back to any age its own assumptions and preconceptions. Revelations and mirages, in the way that Gentle uses them: history as the mirror image of science fiction, which is inevitably always about the present.

History is a metaphor.

"Why history is a metaphor is that it doesn't exist. There is no history. There's nothing there. You can't go back and get what there was five minutes ago, five years ago, five hundred years ago - it's gone. You haven't got the evidence. You may have the evidence of the evidence. You've got nothing else."

Architecture, I demur.

"Architecture stays. What architecture means does not necessarily stay. The forms you build become shells devoid of meaning in another age, and then may well have another meaning imposed on them by a later one."

I remember William Gibson telling me that to him London was the great retro-fitted city, all its buildings adopted and adapted for different purposes by each successive phase of English culture, and bearing the visible remains of time like layers of worn-out clothes. The city of signs. "History is us telling stories to ourselves about what we are and what we aren't. Which is a metaphor," says Gentle, grinning, impatient to get on to the next point, "for whatever the hell it is."

And history is a non-renewable resource.

"Partly this comes out of personal


experience. As a writer, when you use something that's happened to you, you alter it; and then you no longer quite know what's genuine. Also, sitting in front of the Rose Theatre most of the summer of 1989, watching them make a ham sandwich out of what we will never ever have again, what there was only one of to begin with. Also history is something used to buttress ideology, of course, in some cases to substitute for it, which I think brings me round to the Disneyfication of English cul-

ture. Once you've done that with history, it then becomes something you can't use to power a culture. You can't feed off it. What you lose isn't roots, it's motivation."

"Once it's 'heritage'," I say, "it's no longer worth anything." This strikes me as a good line. "Can I say you said that?"

"Sure," she says, happily, and I alter my note. Rewriting history.

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Gothic, Greeks and Chocolate Boxes

Gwyneth Jones

Once, about thirty years ago, I thrilled to the story of How Rouen Cathedral Survived the Allied Bombing, written up in the Reader's Digest. This allegorical hairsbreadth escape seems choked with irony now. What was it that "survived" in 1944? Western Civilization? Oh, fine. Along with Joe Stalin, along with the Manhattan Project... But the image of a great European cathedral – quintessentially a construct that seeks to embody the timeless in time – is the most apposite central image for an imagined world. Particularly one placed in no specific time or space – future, past, other, who can tell? – but firmly in a milieu... the sweat and swagger, rot and roses of the Renaissance.

Books grow from books, stories from stories (all alchemists know it takes gold to make gold). Mary Gentle's *Rats and Gargoyles* (Bantam, £12.99) features characters (not least, a city) already familiar from her recent collection *Scholars and Soldiers*. We meet again the Scholar-Soldier Valentine, a little further along her journey. And the benign Rabelaisian monster Casaubon, who doesn't quite get around to wiping his bottom with a goose's neck (on screen). But manages to do almost everything humans do that's mildly unmentionable, at least five or six times a page.

This is a city in which the Gods live on earth: thirty-six of them, no less, coiled like a nest of giant shellfish in the recesses of their cathedral – the Fane, which has been built through ages, which is both a metaphysical abyss and a physical building. It is a city in which sapient and courtly ratlords rule a helpless human populace. But the Fane is built by human masons, craftfellows who have their own claim both to aristocracy and to mystical power. There is a pretender to the human Imperial Dynasty, (a splendid polychrome Joan of Arc in clanking plate armour, who seems to have stepped down, literally, from her chapel niche...); a rebellion in the sewers; the Rats in turn dream of somehow elbowing their own Masters out of this mortal coil and back to heaven. Naturally, by all of this there hangs a tail (sorry)... of revolution, of magics unleashed, of conspiracy and betrayal and omniscient puppetmasters. The despised Church of the Trees, religion of suffering and life, stands in redeeming opposition to the decay of sacred stone. Unearthly sacrifices are called for. For (of course) the very fabric of the universe is in peril.

Magic, serious magic, means almost exactly the same as building a cathedral. It is a perfect nonsense of pouring the sea into a hole in the sand – conjuring the infinite by finite means. Patterns compel, the reflection can affect what's reflected. (This book is

full of mirrors). Despite the cautious disclaimer on the front page (clearly meant to appease enraged high-ranking officers of the Met who may be coming after her with razor-sharpened carpenter's squares) it seems unlikely that Mary Gentle actually believes in any of this stuff. But she leads a merry and convincing dance through the hermetic mazes. Eternity, however, is a perilous setting for an adventure story. This world in which the gods walk, in which death is an excursion trip, is one in which nothing can ever turn out badly. The reader suspects from the first that the universe will be saved in the end by a sigh and a shrug: Oh, all right then, says the Omnipotent. You can have ten minutes more... Unearthly sacrifices, yes: but few earthly ones transpire. This is the predicament of all adventures in this playground, and Mary Gentle is admirably determined not to fudge. All will be well, sub specie aeternitatis, and all manner of things will be well. And so it is here. But to my mind it is significant that the most engaging character in the book, the dashing Cardinal Rat Plessiez, is the one who cares least for the cosmic dimensions, and is also the only one who actually pays up at the end of the game.

The cast of characters and circumstances is rich almost to overripes. It includes a student prince, a buxom builder landlady; the rat Cardinal's breathless protégé, Zar-bettu-zekigal; and her shaman sister, guide of the Boat of the Dead. To name but a few. The following of each storyline involves some viciously jagged editing: from here to there – snip! – and back again, but a few hundred frames along. There is also a relentless scheme of physical blocking (picks nose with right index finger, steps backwards, crosses bare ankles, scratches furry dug...) which will be useful, no doubt, when they come to do the animation. Meanwhile, it becomes a little exhausting.

The bold use of enduring stone as the seething stuff of decay, the fractal vistas of masons' work that insists upon the reality of the abysses they defy... this is all wonderful art. But vertigo alone stops short of exciting

either pity or terror. A transposition of scale is needed, to bring mortal concerns into focus. Though in Mary Gentle's averted catastrophe things turn out rather differently, for me the mention of Rouen in her acknowledgements put an edge on the book's blunt strength. The Fane is not Rouen, nor Chartres, nor Burgos. But if one refers Gentle's cosmically crucial hour, in which the world may be undone, to certain events of 19th April 1944, this descent proves a life-giving force. These complicated intrigues, madly pursued on the edge of Armageddon; these repentant traitors, these lost platoons of heroes reeling around the streets of the gutted mediaeval city; tanks rumbling over the shattered cobble: it all becomes solid – incarnate... For Dumas, read Pynchon (the pattern is the same). If there'd been more of the mucky ironies of our real history in the actual text – and less maybe, of the imaginary ordure that always comes up smelling of roses – the book would have more emotional power, the one strength that it lacks. But there is still a sense of something absolutely enormous here: an unimaginable complexity, that exists (and nowhere else) on the nethermost edge of annihilation, that somehow survives all forms of material destruction. Or at least, we call it survival. One can never be sure. Here, souls can die too. Damn right.

Still in the great tradition of this predatory genre (no story is safe!), we move from European Renaissance to Athenian Greece. Melissa Scott is a different breed of borrower. *The Kindly Ones* (VGSF, £3.99) may invoke Aeschylus, but its opening sequence cheerfully identifies this as classic car-mad sf. Things get better, Scott is more than just another overhead camshaft bore. Cold planet Orestes has missed out on the homogenizing social pressure of FTL development. It preserves a system of guilt and taboo referred to an ancient, original colonyship mutiny. Those who break the honour code are no longer executed. Instead they become ritually dead: invisible, untouchable, helpless. Trey Maturin, galactical

arbitrator, on this planet becomes a "medium" – one who can speak to the dead. The scenery is enjoyable, the theatrical element intriguing (Athenian theatre with taped hologram puppets in the supernatural/mental-state personification roles). The cold world details are delightfully cosy, the story unfolds. Maturin's employers are practically wiped out in an escalated feud with another clan. She finds herself – along with a "dead" actor – lone champion of the surviving heir; struggles with her conscience, abandons her own sworn obligation to neutrality...

In *Rats and Gargoyles*, the insistence that everyone (of gentle rank) has a right and a need to go armed, is a point made in defiance of certain dichotomous conventions. Melissa Scott feels the same way. Violence in itself is not wrong, nor even ugly. Peacemakers decide it is time to make war, peacekeepers decide peace will be best kept by a dawn attack with all guns blazing. And they both turn out to be right, not horribly mistaken. Meanwhile, the theme that promised to lift this book well out of its class rather fails to deliver. It is interesting to be told that Orestians adopt, in crisis, roles familiar to them from their doomy popular drama – consciously accepting a line feed, and acting from then on strictly in character. It is somehow less interesting when the people (none too richly delineated to start with) start acting like bloodthirsty soap-opera puppets in earnest. The final solution, in which the dead throw off taboo and become an army, ought to be enormously powerful. But by the time it arrives it is far too patently clear that they could have done that anytime in the last hundred or so gory pages. "Why didn't I think of it before?" exclaims Mary Gentle's Valentine, when she at last solves (p.278) the riddle to which the answer's been obvious since p.40...Never mind. There should be an entry in the *Turkey City Lexicon* (Bruce Sterling, *IZ* 39) covering fatal errors that are so embedded in the enterprise that no one avoids them. There are only those who can make you so happy with the passing scene that you don't notice the gaping holes. Science fiction doesn't make sense. Ever. So what. The entertainment was excellent, in both cases.

I took along with me, on this journey to a guest-spot, an Innocent Bystander. He admired *Rats and Gargoyles*, but though he noticed how the last act fell apart, he loved the Melissa Scott. So there you are. The judges' vote goes to the cosmic cathedral story, the popular vote to the car-mad yarn. This is a good result. Exactly like real life.

I've tried to read Sheri S. Tepper before, and retreated, baffled. I was pleasantly surprised by the first layer of *The Marianne Trilogy* (Corgi, £4.99).

This is a proper chocolate box of a story. The lonely young heiress, the wicked step-brother, a fashionable hint of incest, a fabulous father figure, a Ruritanian magic kingdom...I became plagued in the end by irrelevant concern about the magic kingdom. Tucked between the borders of Turkey and Iraq? Oh, what! Really! And their Prime Minister, their head of state, in this year of grace 198X is spending long private holidays in lovely rich-peoples' America...? I grew totally distracted from the chocolate plot, trying to work out what was really going on, with this delicately placed little nation of happy peasants and their benignly autocratic rulers...But this is churlish. Magic probably explains everything. If incest ever comes round again the book would make a great miniseries, which I would watch with pleasure.

The fantasy element in the trilogy involves a life retrofitted by its owner and relived; and further a nest of dreamworlds through which Marianne flees and is pursued. The young woman's powerless state is treated with candour: and her fears. "Marianne" is as disconcertingly clear as a cat-food ad about what lonely, sexy young ladies really want out of life. Nice wallpaper, and a door that locks. Marianne is equally, alarmingly clear about what she'll do with power when she gets it. Expect no mercy from a worm that turns. Once magic enters, the story becomes strongly reminiscent of one of those Freudian early Hitchcock movies (complete with exquisitely dull, wispy "dream sequences"). It would be more interesting if there was the standard Hitchcock ambivalence: is she crazy? Are we following her into madness? Is the Magus really her therapist? Maybe the hint is there, but I missed it.

Sadly, Mariannes Two and Three add nothing and deteriorate rapidly. The dreamworlds become increasingly (or should that be decreasingly) vague, perfunctory, childish. By the end of the third book it was hard to see this project as anything but a tedious consumerist chore for all concerned. Let your robot read the last two.

Diana Wynne Jones' *Castle in the Air* (Methuen, £8.95) purports to be a sequel to *Howl's Moving Castle*. It isn't. It is a cheery Arabian Nights comedy, for a subteen audience, in which characters from the earlier novel make a somewhat contrived appearance. Langley's *The Land Of Green Ginger* covers the same ground, and has more fun for older readers. Let adult followers of children's fiction beware. Not all the stuff labelled juvenile fantasy is meant for you, nor should it be.

Rosemary Kirstein's *The Steerswoman* (Pan, £3.99), on the other hand,

I would classify as a juvenile and fairly routine story of science-returns-after-the-Dark-Ages, were it not for some nasty scenes of physical torture, both described in loving detail and "rationally" justified by the supposedly enlightened, virtuous heroine. The only audience this book could entertain ought to be steered in another direction. There is plenty of honest, unjustified brutal grue around.

Tanith Lee's *Lycanthia* (Legend, £3.50) is an elegant, exquisitely written werewolf tale (with a really horrible cover). It is cunningly told from the point of view of a self-centred little madam of a young pianist, rockstar of La Belle Époque, whose blinkered and sulky entry into his hereditary domain becomes the pattern of another criminally bungled entry into an unknown world. Christian manages to disappoint everyone, most cruelly his innocent and terrible cousins in the forest. Power corrupts – this is the hope of the downtrodden. But seven hundred years away from *force majeure*, corrupted power still manages to rape and rob and kill. Only nowadays, his lordship doesn't even have the grace to do it on purpose.

(Gwyneth Jones)

Three Novels by Women Chris Hampshire

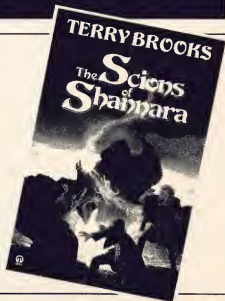
Margaret Bingley's *Seeds of Evil* (Carroll and Graf) speculates in nightmarish fashion about the possibilities of one unscrupulous man abusing the Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID) programme with the aim of populating the world with his own offspring – clairvoyant children of high intelligence, with telepathic and telekinetic powers and a total absence of empathy with living creatures other than themselves.

Meg Marshall's silver-haired, milky-eyed twins Orlando and Olivia are four years old and have stopped talking. Meg and husband Charles are worried, but if they knew what was around the corner they would be grateful for the peace and quiet in the house. Charles, we learn, is a closet gay who has been caught in flagrante delicto by his wife. The unlikely Meg, arguing that homosexuality is an hereditary "taint," has blackmailed him into letting her have children through AID at a no-questions asked private clinic. Little do Meg and Charles know that the twins' biological father, Ashley Webster, has been systematically, and illegally, donating sperm to clinics all over the country in an attempt to create a super race. Will he succeed?

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*Terry Brooks will be in the U.K. to celebrate the paperback publication date of
THE SCIONS OF SHANNARA. Look out for news of his signings.

The novel takes a decidedly reactionary view of humanity. Women are creatures of little brain and no integrity, literally vessels for the breeding of babies: Ashley's children are (without explanation) virtually clones of their paternal grandfather, with no trace of their mothers' contribution to their genetic makeup. Nor does environment have any effect upon their development: whether born into poverty or affluence, they are indistinguishable from one another. As father and mother of the new humanity, sadist Ashley and masochist Meg find their perfect partners in one another, after the twins have seen off the inconvenient Charles. Belatedly, Meg starts fighting back, but the novel concludes by arguing that "Women aren't in any position to judge" the potential dangers of AID, at the same time coming close to endorsing Ashley's behaviour: "He at least had acted as he believed right."

Politically negligible, this is nevertheless an engrossing, scary novel, which unusually presents many of its events through the eyes of the monsters themselves, the relationship between Olivia and Orlando in particular being handled with great skill and imagination.

While Angels Sleep by Judith Kelman (Grafton, £3.50), packaged as a horror novel, is a briskly-paced, skilfully-plotted American thriller with a strongly British flavour. In contrast to *Seeds of Evil* it endorses both liberal and feminist values. Heroine Emily is a tenured lecturer in English literature at Columbia whose childhood was blighted by the death of her mother and mysterious mental breakdown of her sculptor father. On her father's death, Emily returns with her own children to her childhood home, the artists' colony Thornwood, to arrange its sale and, she hopes, to exorcise the past.

In fact, the search for the truth of Emily's childhood is little more than a McGuffin. The real drama is in the present, particularly in Emily's struggle to achieve a loving relationship with her stepdaughter Rachel, who has cast herself as Cinderella, accusing Emily of cruelty while unconvincedly disavowing responsibility for repeated violent attacks on her infant half-brothers and puppy dog Max. Other members of the cast include comic-sinister Granny Prom and ex-Detective Lynch, respectively housekeeper and guest at Thornwood Colony, and the brooding, significantly-named artist, Link.

Despite an uneasy foray into Mills & Boon territory ("I could feel his eyes tracking the length of my body like seeking hands"), Kelman demonstrates a deft hand with black comedy, maintaining a delicate balance between

absurdity and the threat of explosive violence in her depiction of the hostility between rival cooks, Lynch and Granny Prom: "She menaced him with a soup ladle. 'You mind that mouth if you don't want it to lead you into a world of trouble, mister... I happen to prefer food when it doesn't look like someone's already chewed on it and spit it out.'"

Emily is in many ways an admirable heroine, emotionally mature (perhaps implausibly so, given the dark secrets of her childhood), warm yet unsentimental, resourceful and determined. Kelman is both honest and skilful in her sowing of clues along the way, and my only real quibble is – what happened to the dog, Max? No British novelist would have left the beast's fate unresolved.

Much hyped (to my mind, unjustifiably so) from the States comes a first novel by Nancy A. Collins, **Sunglasses After Dark** (Futura, £3.50), another modern reworking of the vampire myth. Collins kicks off promisingly and at great pace, introducing us to Claude Hagerty, orderly at Elysium Fields private mental hospital, and his terrifying charge, Sonja Blue, a supposedly psychotic young woman of enormous physical strength who, as the novel opens, is busily programming her blood to neutralize the tranquillizing drugs controlling her. Soon Blue escapes Elysium Fields on a mission of vengeance with Claude as her reluctant, yet fascinated, sidekick. So far, so good. But at this point, less than a third of the way through the novel, Collins loses her way.

Moving into flashback, we learn about Blue's true nature – she is a vampire, only one of several forms of "pretender" battenning off an unsuspecting humanity. We learn how her metamorphosis came about, and we retrace the events leading to her incarceration in Elysium Fields. Unfortunately, the flashback goes on and on...and on. There is a great deal of violence of a repetitive kind – I lost count of the number of times Blue's ribs got cracked or how many hanks of hair were ripped from assorted scalps. There are no moral ambiguities in Collins' world. Blue takes herself on a tour of Europe and the Far East, attacking more or less at random any other "pretenders" she encounters – ogres, pyrotics, succubi – detecting their true nature beneath their human guise of drug addict, prostitute or child molester. In no other way, however, could Blue be described as an observant traveller. To her, Orientals are inscrutable, and she is under the impression that lower middle class girls in London sit alone in pubs drinking a "weekly glass of stout." Maybe she needs new sunglasses. Nor has Collins much of an ear for dialect: the discourse of the British

characters appears to be modelled on the Dick Van Dyke character in Mary Poppins, Londoners and Glaswegians alike. Here's a sample: "If y'works f'me, you can 'ave anything yer 'eart desires. I'll protect ya. I'll see that th' bobbies never get a hold of y'again."

At the end of this interminable trip down Blue's personal Memory Lane the narrative does get jump-started again from where Collins parked it. I think. But the plot, such as it is, fizzles out long before the closing pages, and your reviewer very nearly did, too.

(Chris Hampshire)

Boys' Games Wendy Bradley

Route 666 ed. David Pringle (GW Books, £4.99) is a hoot, a collection of cybergost stories set in a near-future dystopia peopled entirely by hellcat bitches in fishnets with both kinds of stiletto. Myles Burnham's "Four-Minute Warning" is about as perfect a story as you could wish for – computer hacking, venal TV evangelists, death by television, bloodthirsty little old ladies and even a happy ending. Brian Craig's story "Only in the Twilight" manages to be clever as well as clever-clever and raises a smile.

However, most of the time I was chortling at the book as much as with it: hellcat bitches in fishnets are not our fantasy of dystopian survivalism, boys, they are your fantasy of things to come. The key weakness of the collection is the lack of a single credible female character and this weakness, this misogyny, is the weakness of all this month's batch of books. Jack Yeovil's "Route 666" story reveals that the whole Dark Future dystopia is in fact Marilyn Monroe's fault, for heaven's sake! He also has US Cavalry troopers on motor bikes and armoured cars but this nice touch is then falsified by the female trooper's musings about the sexist comments those tight trousers attract: "nobody ever passed remarks about the way certain Sergeants and Troopers of the male persuasion strained the seats of their uniforms..." Boys, boys, whomever you think we sat through all those tedious John Wayne movies?

Piers Anthony's **Hard Sell** (Tafford, \$18.95) is a book that inspires nothing in me but nausea: a middle-aged male loser is conned out of his life savings and we follow his adventures trying to make an honest buck. His first venture is as salesman for a dodgy adoption agency, and he deduces brilliantly that there is something dubious about the lone male spacer who wants to adopt an eleven-



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year-old girl, "catch her before she gets bitchy, train her right, you know? Older women are unmanageable." Our Hero adopts her himself and he and the little hellion form a perfect partnership – they look after each other, have complementary strengths and weaknesses, build a grudging respect. If she were grown-up they could be Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn but when she's eleven, and when he occasionally has to deal with her temper tantrums with a good spanking, the storyline is less entertaining than frankly pathetic. Suitable reading for those who consider Heinlein's *I Will Fear No Evil* a credible unfolding of the secrets of female psychology, and other jerks.

I also had trouble with Peter Morwood's **The Warlord's Domain** (Legend, £3.50) although here the problem was principally seriesism: if you have been following Aldric and his girlfriend Kyrin's adventures you'll no doubt buy this anyway and if you haven't don't bother because you need three booksworth of background to give a monkey's what happens to anyone in the story. The torture-chamber scene was a surprise given the usual run of the genre – Kyrin expects to be raped and Aldric tortured but instead the Warlord, surprise surprise, does it to Aldric.

Between paragraphs.

May such surprising reticence flourish when it is a woman in question.

And then there is this month's only book by a woman, new writer Jenny Jones. **Fly by Night** (Headline, £7.99) is serious fantasy about a world where time has been stopped and the people live out the stasis that gives them a kind of immortality in a torment of sterility, physical and creative. There are telepathic giant birds on which to ride and moral dilemmas about whether to accept the stasis as the goddess' will and win through by passivity or to act to try and end it and run the risk of struggling being heresy, self-defeating. A woman, Eleanor Knight, is brought from this world into that by a freak accident here, a failed heretical experiment there. She quests, she sets time moving again, she grows up and goes home – although nothing is really resolved as there are sequels to come. But she stands alone as a character, a spoiled brat with no female friends, a cardboard cut-out of a woman standing amongst all these three-dimensional men as if... well, as if she had been written by a man.

Horror writers, of course, hardly need to trouble with their female characters while there is screaming to be done and slithery stuff to ooze. Daniel Rhodes' **Kiss of Death** (New English Library, £13.95) is accomplished enough; another middle-aged loser,

this time an American travelling through Europe with his nubile daughter, gives in to an impulse and adds his mark to the pledges in blood on an ancient shrine to the goddess. Later he is seduced by a vampiric woman in black and given the rogering of his life but informed that now he must pay – and his daughter promptly screams the hotel awake, dreaming of rape by a goathish demon.

The daughter's pregnancy is the father's payment and the daughter conveniently dies in childbirth giving birth to Selena. Rhodes' goddess is in fact not the goddess at all but your everyday run of the mill Satan in drag: Selena is cursed with attendant imps, all goathish and male, which prey on anyone she "loves" and drive them mad with their own worst desires. Most of the book is taken up with hunky Doc Gene Farrell and his growing fascination with Selena, but Selena herself gets a crummy deal – she is an avatar of the goddess but never gets to communicate with her except through hostile imps? She loves Farrell but she can't have him without killing him so he thoughtfully rapes her and then goes off to die quietly, if unsuccessfully? Boys, boys!

The title of James Herbert's **Creed** (Hodder and Stoughton, £12.95) is not a reference to religion but the name of the principal character, a scummy paparazzo. Creed the character is meant to be a crumb, but a likeable crumb, elbowing his way through the photographers' pack and coming out of any event with the key photograph of the celeb at bay. The plot is tosh to do with ancient demons and revived corpses and the style is likeable enough, Herbert cajoling us along with Brechtian inserts where he reminds us what a crumb Creed is and invites our complicity in enjoying his struggles with the world, flesh and devil. Ah, but the women! The demon rogers Creed in an oozing goey amorphousness that is Freudian enough to invite shrieks of laughter, and of course Creed is saved by the love and plot devices of a good woman whose unmotivated and inventive enthusiasm for Creed's body hangs in the air supported only by the author's wishful thinking.

(Wendy Bradley)

IMAGINARY PEOPLE: David Pringle's *Who's Who of Modern Fictional Characters* (Grafton, 1987, £14.95) is still available from *Interzone* at just £6 per copy (postage included). Overseas price £7.50 or US \$12 by sea mail. It's a hardcover book of over 500 pages, packed with information about imaginary people from Robinson Crusoe to J.R. Ewing and beyond. Order yours now from *Interzone*, 124 Osborne Rd., Brighton BN1 6LU, UK.

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aldiss, Brian. **Starswarm**. "VGSP Classics 45." Gallancz/VGSP, ISBN 0-575-04182-X, 190pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF collection, first published in the USA, 1964; it contains many overlaps with the original, UK-published collection *Airs of Earth* [1963], 16th August.

Anderson, Poul. **The Boat of a Million Years**. Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0609-X, 390pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; Anderson's first big new sf novel in many years, it doesn't seem to have been judged worthy of hardcover publication in the UK.) 23rd August.

Asimov, Isaac. **Nemesis**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-00669-X, 447pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 33.) 21st September.

Attanasio, A. A. Wyvern. **Grafton**, ISBN 0-586-06915-1, 640pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy/adventure novel, first published in the USA, 1988; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 31.) Late entry: June publication, received in August.

Austin, Richard. **The Guardians: Night of the Phoenix**. "The fourth adventure in the blistering new series." Pan, ISBN 0-330-31572-2, 216pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1985; the author is pseudonymous.) 14th September.

Austin, Richard. **The Guardians: Thunder of Hell**. "The third adventure..." Pan, ISBN 0-330-31307-X, 217pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1985; sequel to *The Guardians and Trial by Fire*.) 14th September.

Blacklock, James P. **The Last Coin**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20178-5, 399pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; for some reason, were not sent a copy of the Grafton hardcover of this last year, so it missed review at the time; it has received a good deal of praise elsewhere, and is regarded by some as the oddball Mr Blacklock's best novel to date.) Late entry: June publication, received in August.

Brunner, John. **Children of The Thunder**. Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0537-9, 390pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; a first UK appearance of this title by a British author who seems to be more honoured in the States than at home.) 23rd August.

Bujold, Lois McMaster. **Brothers in Arms**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3477-9, 338pp, paperback, £4.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; another volume in the author's ongoing "Miles Vorkosigan" series of space adventures.) 9th August.

Carter, Brian. **In the Long Dark**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-961740-4, 243pp, paperback, £3.50. (Animal fantasy novel, first published in 1989.) 4th October.

Cherry, C. J. **Rusalka**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0372-7, 374pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; this edition comes only two

months after the Methuen hardcover, reviewed by Neil Jones in *Interzone* 4.) 2nd August.

Cook, Hugh. **The Wazir and the Witch.** "Chronicles of an Age in Darkness: Volume 7." Congi. ISBN 0-552-13537-2. 448pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous/fantasy novel, first edition [?]; the accompanying publicity tells us that this New Zealand author's massive series will run to 20 volumes.) 21st September.

Dillard, J. M. **Star Trek: The Lost Years.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-31609-5, 307pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf "shared-universe" novel, first published in the USA, 1989; this one was a hardcover bestseller in America.) 14th September.

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **Best New SF 4.** Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-057-2, 598pp, paperback, £6.99. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA as *The Year's Best Science Fiction*, Seventh Annual Collection, 1990; contains two stories reprinted from *Interzone*, William King's "Visiting the Dead" and Brian Stableford's "The Magic Bullet," plus 23 tales from other magazines and books of 1989; recommended.) 23rd August.

Duncan, Dave. **The Coming of Wisdom: Book Two of The Seventh Sword.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-965650-7, 338pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 6th September.

Forward, Bob. **The Owl 2: Scarlet Serenade.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53215-1, 207pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 6th September.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **Revenge of the Fluffy Bunnies: The Caneverse Cycle.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3456-6, 279pp, paperback, £3.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1990.) 13th September.

Garnett, David S., ed. **The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook Three.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8337-0, 361pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; contains reprinted stories by David Brin, John Crowley, James Morrow, Lucius Shepard, Bruce Sterling, Connie Willis and others, as well as non-fiction by Brian Aldiss, Iain Banks and John Clute; reviewed by Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh in *Interzone* 41.) 23rd August.

Garnett, Rhys, and R. J. Ellis, eds. **Science Fiction Roots and Branches: Contemporary Critical Approaches.** "Insights." Macmillan Press, ISBN 0-333-46909-7, 210pp, trade paperback, £12.99. (Anthology of critical essays, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; contains pieces on William Morris, H. G. Wells, Stanislas Lem, John Wyndham, Frank Herbert, Ursula Le Guin, Vonda McIntyre, etc., by such critics as Marleen Barr, Lem, Patrick Parrinder, Robert M. Philmus and Darko Suvin.) August?

Gilluly, Sheila. **Greenbriar Queen.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3454-X, 439pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; reviewed by Phyllis McDonald in *Interzone* 30.) 13th September.

Green, Simon. **No Haven for the Guilty.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3480-9, 213pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?], 9th August.

Herbert, Frank. **The Dosadi Experiment.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04406-3, 336pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1977.) 16th August.

Hubbard, L. Ron. **Mission Earth, Volume Five: Fortune of Fear.** New Era, ISBN 1-

8704511-2, 395pp, paperback, £3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) Late entry: 26th July publication, received in August.

Hyde, Christopher. **Egypt Green.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3202-4, 442pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf/horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1989; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 36.) 13th September.

Jarvis, Robin. **The Final Reckoning: Book Three of The Deptford Mike.** Illustrated by the author. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-7500-0272-7, 305pp, paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 23rd August.

Kaveney, Roz, ed. **More Tales from The Forbidden Planet.** Illustrated by Dave McKean, Gilbert Shelton and others. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-332-3, 268pp, trade paperback, £7.95. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; contains new stories by Mary Gentle, David Langford, Larry Niven, Terry Pratchett, John Sladek, Ian Watson and others; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 30th September.

Kay, Guy Gavriel. **Tigana.** "An epic novel of intrigue and revenge." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-013111-6, 688pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; there is a simultaneous Viking hardcover edition [not seen].) 30th August.

Koontz, Dean R. **Phantoms.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0300-8, 446pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1983; this appears to be the second British hardcover edition, the first having come from W. H. Allen seven years ago.) 13th September.

Koontz, Dean R. **Phantoms.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3524-4, 448pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1983; a mass-market paperback edition which appears simultaneously with the above hardcover.) 13th September.

Koontz, Dean R. **Shattered.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3523-6, 245pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1973; it originally appeared in both America and Britain under the pseudonym "K. R. Dwyer.") 13th September.

Koontz, Dean R. **Voice of the Night.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3519-8, 340pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1980; it originally appeared in both America and Britain under the pseudonym "Brian Coffey.") 13th September.

Lansdale, Joe R. **The Drive-In 2 (Not Just One of Them Sequels).** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53219-4, 179pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 6th September.

Lewis, C. S. **The Cosmic Trilogy: Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hideous Strength.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-31374-6, 753pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/fantasy omnibus, first published [by Bodley Head] in 1990; the three novels were originally published in 1938, 1943 and 1945; *Perelandra* was previously issued in Pan paperback as *Voyage to Venus*; the text of *That Hideous Strength* presented here is the full one, not the abridged version of earlier Pan editions.) 14th September.

Littell, Jonathan. **Bad Voltage.** Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0584-0, 309pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; it's a debut book by an author who was just 19 at the time of publication; he's the son of thriller writer Robert Littell.) 27th September.

Lumley, Brian. **Necroscope IV: DeadSpeak.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20904-2, 556pp,

paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first edition.) 30th August.

McGirt, Dan. **Royal Chaos.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-31608-7, 246pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; sequel to *Jason Cosmo*.) 14th September.

Martine-Barnes, Adrienne. **The Sea Sword.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3418-3, 292pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; fourth in a series.) 9th August.

Morgan, Chris, ed. **Dark Fantasies.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-967830-6, 319pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first published in 1989; reviewed by Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh in *Interzone* 32.) 6th September.

Morwood, Peter. **Prince Ivan.** Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3409-6, 280pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; first of a new series by this Irish-born writer, set in a fantastic medieval Russia.) 13th September.

Murdoch, M. S. **Armageddon off Vesta: Book Three, The Martian War Trilogy.** "Buck Rogers Books." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-013177-8, 279pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 27th September.

Novak, Kate, and Jeff Krub. **The Wyvern's Spur.** "Forgotten Realms. Book Two: The Finder's Stone Trilogy." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014365-3, 313pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 6th September.

Paxson, Diana. **The Earthstone.** "Book Three of the Chronicles of Westria." Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-52472-8, 278pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 6th September.

Peyton, Richard, ed. **The Ghost Now Standing on Platform One: Phantoms of the Railways in Fact and Fiction.** Souvenir Press, ISBN 0-285-62991-3, 322pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Ghost-story anthology, first edition; contains reprinted tales by Robert Aickman, Algernon Blackwood, Ray Bradbury, Charles Dickens, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Rudyard Kipling, John Wyndham and many others.) 6th September.

Pratchett, Terry. **Wings: The Third Book of the Nomes.** Doubleday, no ISBN shown, 158pp, hardcover, £9.95. (Juvenile sf/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) September.

Preuss, Paul. **Arthur C. Clarke's Venus Prime, Volume 1: Breaking Strain.** Illustrated by Darrell Anderson. Afterword by Arthur C. Clarke. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30634-0, 265pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; it's a "Byron Preiss Visual Publication," based on short stories by Clarke.) 14th September.

Preuss, Paul. **Starfire.** Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0440-2, 310pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 23rd August.

Pringle, David, ed. **Route 666.** "Dark Future." Illustrated by Kevin Walker and others. GW Books, ISBN 1-872372-03-1, 254pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; nine original stories loosely based on the background of the game "Dark Future"; first volume in a series which has been delayed since the spring of 1990 [see interview with Kim Newman, *Interzone* 36, for further details].) Contributors include Jack Yeovil [Kim Newman], Brian Craig [Brian Stableford], Neil Jones and William King.] August.

Resnick, Mike. **Ivory.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-960070-6, 375pp, paperback, £3.99.

(Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 6th September.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **Pacific Edge**. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440632-0, 280pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first edition; the publishers don't say so, but it would appear to be the third book in the loose, thematic trilogy of which the first two parts were *The Wild Shore* and *The Gold Coast*.) 27th September.

Rohan, Michael Scott. **Chase the Morning**. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8338-9, 334pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) Late entry: 26th July publication, received in August.

Rubinstein, Gillian. **Beyond the Labyrinth**. Mandarin/Teens, ISBN 0-7497-0280-X, 170pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile sf [?] novel, first published in Australia, 1987; winner of a "Children's Book of the Year" award.) Late entry: 19th July publication, received in August.

Rubinstein, Gillian. **Skymaze**. Mandarin/Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-0397-0, 193pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in Australia, 1989; sequel to *Spice Demons*.) Late entry: 19th July publication, received in August.

Rubinstein, Gillian. **Space Demons**. Mandarin/Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-0410-1, 213pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in Australia, 1986; winner of several awards, and apparently a big seller in Australia.) Late entry: 19th July publication, received in August.

Sampson, Fay. **The White Horse is Running**. Lion, ISBN 0-7459-1915-4, 168pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition; sixth and last in the "Pangur Ban" series.) 31st August.

Shupp, Mike. **Soldier of Another Fortune: Book Three of The Destiny Games**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3419-1, 396pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 9th August.

Silverberg, Robert. **The World Inside**. Gollancz/VGCSF, ISBN 0-575-04691-0, 174pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1971.) 16th August.

Stableford, Brian. **The Gates of Eden**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53203-8, 176pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1983; although the author is British, this is the first UK edition, and it's a straight reproduction of the original DAW Books setting.) 6th September.

Thompson, Paul B., and Tonya R. Carter. **Riverwind the Plainsman: Dragonlance Saga Preludes II, Volume One**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014364-5, 313pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 6th September.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The War of the Ring: The History of The Lord of the Rings, Part Three: "The History of Middle-Earth VII"**. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440685-1, 476pp, hardcover, £17.95. (More posthumous drafts of episodes from the author's great fantasy novel, heavily annotated by his son; first edition.) 23rd August.

Watson, Ian. **Salvage Rites and Other Stories**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20853-4, 252pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf collection, first published in 1989.) 30th August.

Williams, Tad. **Stone of Farewell: Book Two of Memory, Sorrow and Thorn**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3507-6, 594pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 13th October.

Wilson, F. Paul. **Reborn**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-53663-7, 344pp, hard-

cover, £13.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990; sequel to *The Keep*.) 20th September.

Wilson, Robert Charles. **A Hidden Place**. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8341-9, 212pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986; Wilson's debut novel, now appearing in Britain for the first time.) Late entry: 26th July publication, received in August.

Wilson, Robert Charles. **Memory Wire**. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8340-9, 219pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) Late entry: 26th July publication, received in August.

Wynne-Jones, Diana. **A Tale of Time City**. Mandarin/Teens, ISBN 0-7497-0440-3, 285pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in 1987.) Late entry: 19th July publication, received in August.

Wynne-Jones, Diana. **Witch Week**. Mandarin/Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-0174-9, 210pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1992.) Late entry: 19th July publication, received in August.

Yeovil, Jack. **Demon Download**. "Dark Future. Book One in the Demon Download Cycle." Illustrated by Martin McKenna, Kevin Walker and others. CW Books, ISBN 1-872372-06-6, 253pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first edition; described in the blurb as "arcane cybergoth fiction," it's set in the alternative, near-future world of the game "Dark Future"; although it's described as "Book One," it actually follows on from the title story of the anthology *Role 666* [see above, under Pringle]; "Jack Yeovil" is a pseudonym for Kim Newman.) August.

Overseas Books Received

Ballard, J. G. **The Atrocity Exhibition**. New revised edition, with notes by the author. Illustrated by Phoebe Gloeckner and Ana Barrado. Re/Search Publications [20 Romolo #8, San Francisco, CA 94133, USA], ISBN 0-940642-18-2, 140pp, trade paperback, £13.99. (Sf collection, first published in the UK, 1970; there is a simultaneous signed, limited hardcover edition [not seen]; this is a beautifully produced large-format book which reprints the original text together with four additional pieces - "Princess Margaret's Facelift," "Mae West's Reduction Mammoplasty," "Queen Elizabeth's Rhinoplasty" and "The Secret History of World War 3" - plus copious, fascinating, newly written marginal notes by Ballard - very highly recommended.) August.

[Goudriaan, Roelof, ed.] **The Mound and Other SF Stories from the Low Lands: King Kong Award Winners 1990**. Babel Publications [Caan van Necklaan 63, 2281BB Rijswijk, Netherlands], no ISBN shown, 84pp, paperback, no price shown. (Sf anthology, first edition; contains five original Dutch sf stories, translated into English and published in this form to coincide with the World Sf Convention in The Hague, August 1990; the authors are Paul Harland, Jan Bess Landman, Thomas Wintner, Gerben Hellings and Jan J. B. Kuipers; a small note inside states that this booklet is actually issues 27 and 28 of the occasional newsletter *Shards of Bobel*.) 23rd August.

McCaffery, Larry, ed. **Across the Wounded Galaxies: Interviews with Contemporary American Science Fiction Writers**. University of Illinois Press, ISBN 0-252-01692-0, 267pp, hardcover, \$29.95. (Interview collection, first edition; this looks to be an exceptionally interesting volume, containing as it does substantial interviews with William Burroughs, Samuel R. Delany,

Thomas M. Disch, William Gibson, Ursula Le Guin, Gene Wolfe and others.) 15th September.

Newman, Kim. **The Night Mayor**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-642-2, 186pp, \$17.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1989; it wrongly states "Copyright 1990" inside.) September?

Tella, Alfred. **Sundered Soul: A Mythic Tale**. Three Continents Press [1901 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20006, USA], ISBN 0-89410-694-5, 226pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; it comes with a cover commendation from Piers Anthony, who describes it as "exquisitely crafted" and "beautifully styled.") Late entry: 1st July publication, received in August.

Magazines Received August 1990

The following is a list of all English-language sf- and fantasy-related journals, magsazines and small-press periodicals received by Interzone during the month specified above. It includes overseas publications as well as those from the UK. (Some foreign titles reach us late if they have been posted seamount.)

Aboriginal Science Fiction no. 23, September-October 1990. ISSN 0895-3198. 68pp. Ed. Charles C. Ryan, PO Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888-0849, USA. Bimonthly fiction magazine of good quality. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and several internal colour illustrations. Contributors: John Gribbin, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Michael Swanwick, etc. \$15 per annum, USA; \$18, overseas.

Dream Science Fiction no. 25, September 1990. No ISSN shown. 68pp. Eds. George P. Townsend and Trevor Jones, 7 Welier Place, High Elms Rd., Downe, Orpington, Kent BR6 7JW. Bimonthly small-press fiction magazine. A5 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: P. F. Hamilton, Mark D. Haw, etc. £7 per annum, UK; £8, overseas, payable to publisher Trevor Jones, 1 Ravenshoe, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18 8DE. (Note: this magazine is a member of the New SF Alliance clearinghouse; write to the address of BBR for further details - c/o Chris Reed, 16 Somerset Lane, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S40 3LA.)

Exuberance no. 1, Summer 1990. ISSN 0959-4558. 60pp. Ed. Jason R. Smith, 34 Croft Close, Chipperfield, Herts. WD9 6PA. Quarterly small-press fiction magazine. A4 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Steven Widdowson, D. F. Lewis, etc. £6.50 per annum, UK; \$15, USA. (This is the first issue of a promising new magazine; the design and layout leave something to be desired, but the typeface is large and clear.)

Critical Wave no. 18, September 1990. No ISSN shown. 28pp. Eds. Steve Green and Martin Tudor, 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, W. Midlands B92 7LQ. Bimonthly news magazine. A4 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: various (interview with Larry Niven and Steven Barnes). £5 per annum, UK; £7, overseas (payable to "Critical Wave Publications," 24A Beech Rd., London N11 2DA).

Dark Horizons no. 31, 1990 (no more specific date is given). No ISSN shown. 40pp. Ed. Phil Williams, 8 Milton Close, Severn Meadows, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY1 2UE. Irregular small-press magazine for members of the British Fantasy Society.

A5 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Ramsey Campbell, D.F. Lewis, Guy N. Smith, etc. Cover price: £1 (Membership of the British Fantasy Society is £10 per annum, UK; \$24, USA. Write to Dr Wathen, 15 Stanley Rd., Morden, Surrey SM4 5DE.)

Fear no. 21, September 1990. ISSN 0954-8017. 84pp. Ed. John Gilbert, c/o Newfield, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW. Monthly horror-fiction and film magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and many internal colour illustrations. Contributors: Brian Stabelford, Darrell Schweitzer, etc. (interviews with Stabelford, Harlan Ellison and Diane Duane, among others). £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; \$49.50, USA. (North American subscribers should write to British Magazine Distributors Ltd, 598 Durham Cres., Unit 14, Woodstock, Ontario N4S 5X3, Canada - who also handle Interzone.)

Games Master International no. 1, August 1990. ISSN 0960-1325. 84pp. Eds. Tim McCalfe, Paul Boughton & Wayne, c/o Newfield, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW. Monthly sf-and-fantasy games magazine which carries some fiction (in this case a novel extract). A4 size, with full-colour cover and some colour interior illustrations. Contributors: David Langford, Mike Scott, Robert Ashby, Ashley Watkins, etc. £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; £36, elsewhere airmail. (Note: this is effectively the old GM magazine reborn, but in its new incarnation it has exactly the same size, left and general "feel" as its stablemate *Fear*.)

The Gate: Science Fiction & Fantasy no. 2, no date shown (received in August, though we hear it was mailed to subscribers in July 1990). ISSN 0955-0933. 44pp. Ed. Richard Newcombe, W Publishing, 28 Seville Rd., Westwood, Peterborough PE3 7PR. Irregular fiction magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Sean & Barrington Bayley, Gary Killyworth, Kim Newman, etc. £5 for four issues, UK (payable to "W Publishing"); no overseas rates shown. (Frankly, we were astonished to receive this, some 15 months after the first issue; the format has changed, and it looks much more like a real magazine; there must still be severe doubts, though, as to whether there will ever be a third issue.)

Kosmoskynä no. 2, 1990. ISSN 0785-2517. 32pp. Ed. Jyrki J. Kasvi, Servin-Majantie 6F 94, SF-02150 Espoo, Finland. Thrice-yearly (?) magazine of the Finnish Science Fiction Writers Association. A4 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Johanna Sinisalo, etc. (includes an article on "The Kalevala as a Source of Inspiration"). No subscription rates shown. (It's entirely in English, and an accompanying note describes it as a "special Finnish issue.")

Locus: The Newspaper of the Science Fiction Field no. 355, August 1990. ISSN 0047-4959. 68pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and mainly black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Faren Miller, Tom Whitmore, Russell Letson, etc. (interviews with Robert Silverberg and Mike Resnick). \$32 per annum, USA; \$37, overseas airmail; \$60, overseas airmail/UK subscription agent: Fantast [Medway] Ltd, PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs. PE14 9BU).

Locus: The Newspaper of the Science Fiction Field no. 356, September 1990. ISSN 0047-4959. 80pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size,

with full-colour cover and mainly black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Dan Chow, Carolyn Cushman, Mark R. Kelly, etc. (interviews with Megan Lindholm and Kristine Kathryn Rusch). \$32 per annum, USA; \$37, overseas airmail; \$60, overseas airmail (UK subscription agent: Fantast [Medway] Ltd, PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs. PE14 9BU).

Matrix: The Newsletter of the British Science Fiction Association no. 89, August-September 1990. ISSN 0307-3335. 24pp. Ed. Jenny Glover, 16 Aviary Place, Leeds LS12 2NP. Bimonthly news magazine for members of the BSFA. A4 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Paul Kincaid, Nicholas Mahoney, etc. Membership of the BSFA is £12 per annum from Joanne Raine, Membership Secretary, 33 Thornville Rd., Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW. (Note: this issue came bundled with *Paperback Inferno* no. 85, a 16pp review of paperbacks, ed. Andy Sawyer; and *Focus* no. 21, a 16pp writers' magazine, ed. Cecil Nurse; the BSFA's critical journal *Vegetarian*, failed to appear in time for this mailing.)

New Pathways no. 18, November 1990. ISSN 0886-2451. 68pp. Ed. Michael G. Addison, MGA Services, PO Box 863994, Plano, TX 75086-3994. Bimonthly fiction magazine. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations (plus a few colour film stills). Contributors: Paul Di Filippo, Jonathan Lethem, Don Webb, etc. \$25 per annum, USA; \$36, overseas (payable to "MGA Services").

New York Review of Science Fiction no. 24, August 1990. No ISSN shown. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell, Gordon Van Gelder et al., c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NJ 10570, USA. Monthly critical journal of high quality. US quarto size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Samuel R. Delany, John Kessel, Alexei Panshin, etc. \$24 per annum, USA; \$36, overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

Nightfall no. 2, no date shown (received in August 1990). No ISSN shown. 68pp. Ed. Noel K. Hannan, 18 Lansdowne Rd., Sydney, NSW, Cheshire CW1 1JY. Irregular small-press fiction and comic-strip magazine. A5 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Andy Darlington, D.F. Lewis, Nicholas Royle, etc. £5 for three issues, UK; \$10, USA. (The editor promises an enlarged A4 format from the next issue.)

Probe no. 80, June 1990. No ISSN shown. 80pp. Ed. Neil van Nieuwen, c/o SFSA, PO Box 2538, Primrose 1418, South Africa. Quarterly fiction and non-fiction fanzine of the Club "Science Fiction South Africa." A5 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: various. R25 per annum.

Quantum: Science Fiction & Fantasy Review no. 37, Summer 1990. ISSN 0198-6686. 36pp. Ed. D. Douglas Fratz, Thrust Publications, 8217 Langport Terrace, Gaithersburg, MD 20877, USA. Quarterly magazine of criticism and comment. US quarto size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Poul Anderson, Richard E. Geis, David Langford, etc. (interview with Michael G. Coney). \$9 per annum, USA; \$12, overseas. (Note: formerly *Thrust*, this is the second issue to be called *Quantum*.)

Science Fiction Chronicle no. 131, August 1990. ISSN 0195-5365. 44pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and mainly black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Don D'Amassa, Steve Jones & Jo Fletcher, Ed Naha, etc. \$27 per

annum, USA; £25, UK (the latter payable to "Algot Press," c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ).

Skeleton Crew no. 3, September 1990. ISSN 0959-8006. 64pp. Ed. Dave Reeder, Argus House, Boundary Way, Hemel Hempstead HP2 7ST. Monthly horror-fiction magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some colour interior illustrations. Contributors: R. Chetwynd-Hayes, Brian Lumley, Philip Nutman, etc. £23.40 per annum, UK; \$56, USA. (Note: the founding editor, Dave Hughes, left rather abruptly after just two issues; the rival magazine, *Newfield's Fear*, gleefully reported the contretemps in its August issue, not having decided to mention *Skeleton Crew* up to that point.)

Starburst no. 145, September 1990. ISSN 0955-114X. 56pp. Ed. Stephen Payne, Visual Imagination Ltd, PO Box 371, London SW14 8JL. Monthly sf/fantasy media magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some internal colour illustrations. Contributors: John Brosnan, Brian Lumley, etc. (it's a "horror issue" and there's an interview with Clive Barker). £22 per annum, UK; \$40, USA. (Note: it's still describing itself as "Britain's premier science fiction magazine"; we had words with the editor on the subject at the *Interzone*/Aldiss party in July; he told us that the circulation is near 40,000, which is certainly impressive, but as it doesn't carry any fiction we still feel the magazine is wrongly billed.)

TV Zone no. 10, September 1990. ISSN 0957-3844. 32pp. Ed. Jan Vincent-Rudzki, Visual Imagination Ltd, PO Box 371, London SW14 8JL. Monthly sf/fantasy-on-TV magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some internal colour illustrations. Contributors: various. £16 per annum, UK; \$34, USA.

Weird Tales no. 298, Fall 1990. ISSN 0898-5073. 148pp. Eds. George H. Scithers, Darrell Schweitzer and John Betancourt, c/o Terminum Publishing Company, PO Box 13418, Philadelphia, PA 19101-3418, USA. Quarterly horror-and-fantasy fiction magazine of high quality. 9.25 inches tall by 6.5 wide, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Stephen King, Ian MacLeod, Ian Watson, Chet Williamson, etc. \$26 per annum, USA; \$33, elsewhere. (Note: this is the first issue of the revived *Weird Tales* we've seen, and we're impressed.)

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Interaction

Continued from page 5

And we're delighted when readers send us long, detailed letters such as yours. Yes, we'd like to run more letters, space permitting; it would help, though, if they could come in typewritten form whenever possible.

Dear Editors:

Congratulations on the monthly *IZ*, which is looking very good. Even the artwork, my favourite bugbear, is looking better. I still have problems with some of the stories, but maybe that's just my individual foibles. Keith Brooke's "Beefcake" (and, boy, do I hate Keithy-babe's mother-fixation) was all very well as far as it went, which wasn't very far, but I'd be much more interested in seeing what the child made of its parents (or they of him). "Dilation Sleep," again, seemed to have too narrow a focus – the wassinae plague was far too interesting to throw away on a short.

For "Lizard Lust" I reserve my special venom – 16-year-olds' consciousness-raising workshops usually have better fodder than this (I know, I was there). Tuttle doesn't so much lay a thick layer of metaphor on the story as bury it under a mound which would dwarf the pyramid of the sun. Does she really think we wouldn't get the point otherwise? She obviously thinks that men think with their lizard brains – no wait, that's too subtle, needs knowledge of anatomy and developmental biology to get the joke. I know! – she obviously thinks men think with their penises! (That's better – hope everyone gets that. Might still be a bit subtle, though.) And what do we get once we fight through the symbolism like gravid turtles through kelp? Not much. It's a "gazing moodily at cans of baked beans" story – no suspense, no resolution, no onstage action (Gart is killed between paragraphs), not even a moral we can use as an aid in real life.

Lyle Hopwood

San Juan Capistrano, California

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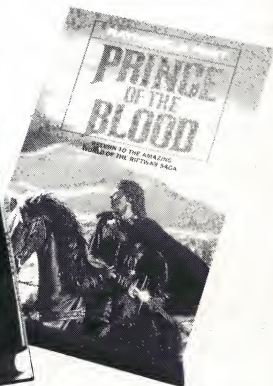
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